

THE LONDON READER

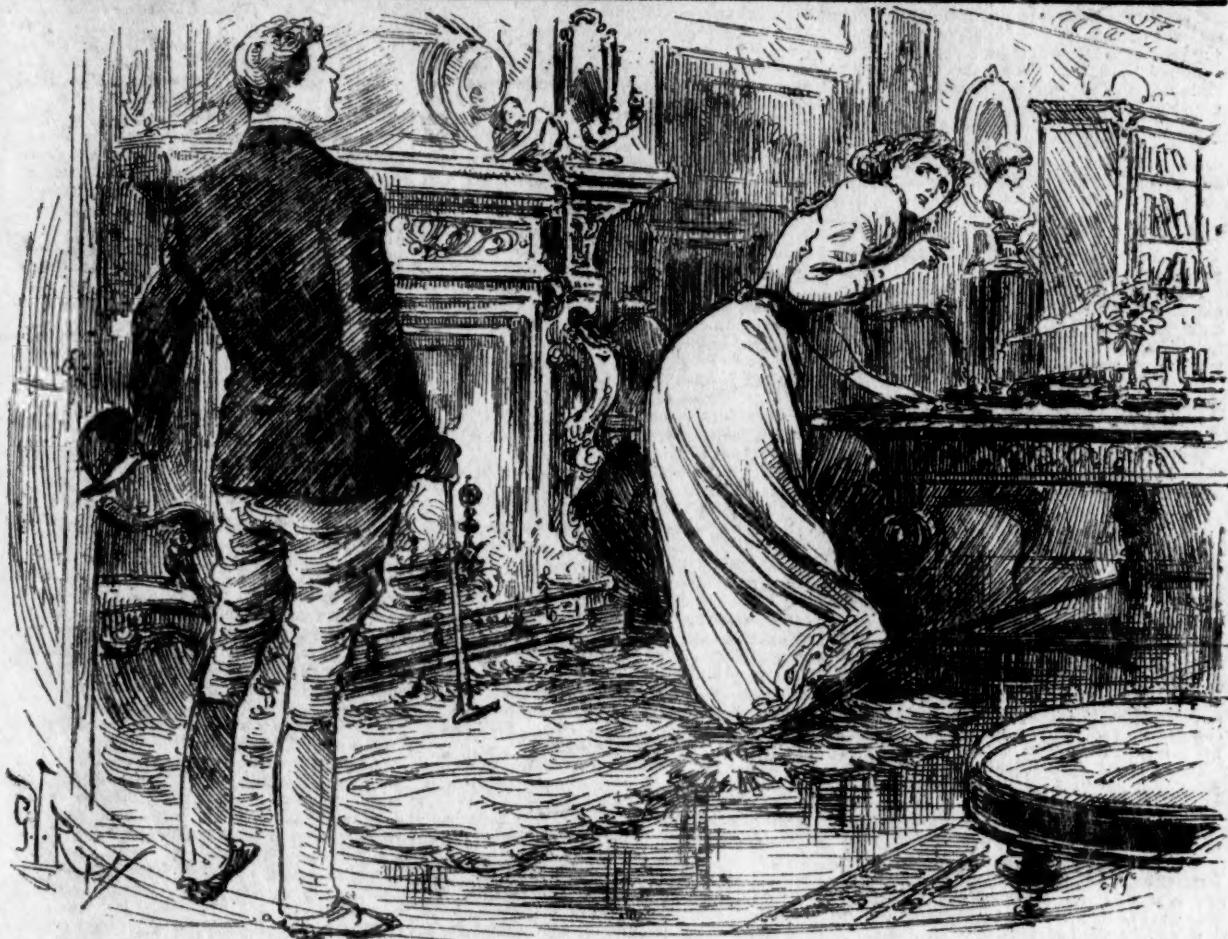
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No. 1659.—VOL. LXIV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 16, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"DID I FRIGHTEN YOU, VIOLA?" CECIL SAID, WITH A LAUGH. "I DECLARE YOU'RE AS WHITE AS A SHEET!"

VIOLA'S PORTION.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"My poor sister Violet's only child you know, Catherine! Dear! dear! one never looked forward to such a thing, of course; but—but—"

And Mr. Chesterfield laid down a letter he held in his hand, with a foreign stamp and post mark on it—pushed back his spectacles—ruffled his abundant grey hair with a bewildered gesture, and looked at his wife as if for guidance and advice.

"Your sister's only child! Yes, George, I know," replied Mrs. Chesterfield, a thin, quiet, pale-faced invalid who lay back in her arm chair, her velvet-slipped feet on the bright brass fender, and a costly Indian wrap thrown over her shoulders, partly hiding her rich dress and handsome old-fashioned ornaments. "Her only child—an orphan now. We—I don't see how we can refuse, George."

"No—no—I suppose we can't—indeed, I felt sure you would say we couldn't, Catherine, and you are always right, my dear! Perhaps it won't be for long. Poor Cassidy mentions a—a suitor—a lover who is anxious to marry her when he has settled some affairs in which he is engaged—perhaps in a year's time. Poor Cassidy! how well I remember him, a fine, tall dashing sort of fellow—a little wild you know—who won poor little Violet's heart in a week. Well, I suppose I'd better send a cable to say we expect her, to the address Tom gives—ay, my dear!"

"Yes, I suppose so, George, and—and where is Vera, my love? I'd better tell her about it."

"Cecil Hasted came in just now, and she's gone out with him to see the young colt. Well, I suppose, judging by appearances, we may have a wedding in the family before a year is out, my dear," said Mr. Chesterfield, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Chesterfield, in a low voice. "Vera is very young, though."

"Only a few months younger than you were when you married me, Kate," replied Mr. Chesterfield, with a fond look at his wife's pale, delicate face.

"Yes; but—that seems so different—the young men of the present day aren't like—like you were George," replied Mrs. Chesterfield, gravely; "not that I have a word to say against Cecil, you know," she added, hurriedly, "only I find it hard to express just what I mean—the young men of the present day don't seem to me so earnest, so steady, so sterling, as the young men of our time were. I may be mistaken though, and I know I'm old-fashioned in my ideas. Poor Tom Cassidy! his career was not a very prosperous one, I fear."

"No, that is, he has had troubles and losses, though how he stood at the last I know not. He tells me he has sent home a wonderful parcel of stones through Gordon and Fask, which he wishes me to take charge of for Viola, till she is married; then I am to sell them and the money they fetch is to be settled on her. I wonder what the worth of them may be. He doesn't speak of having any other property, so I suppose they are valuable."

"No doubt. Well, they will be safe enough here till Viola's suitor comes over for her. What age is the child, George?" said Mrs. Chesterfield, musingly.

"Let me see—a year older than Vera, I fancy. Yes, of course! she was born the year we were in Spain, Catherine," he replied.

"Ah, yes! I remember. I hope she will prove a nice companion for Vera, any child of Violet's, though, would be nice I am sure; what a sweet creature she was—a veritable sunbeam in the house. I don't wonder Tom Cassidy never got over her loss."

"Nor I. Well, I'll send off the cable then, Catherine. I agree with you. I really think we ought to undertake the responsibility."

Yet still there was a look of doubt in his grey eyes as he glanced at his wife, appealingly.

"Yes, I think we ought, certainly," she answered, in a firm, quiet voice. "Write the cable at once, dear, and let James take it into Churton, to the post-office."

Mr. Chesterfield, with a sigh of relief (when he was once certain his wife approved of a plan, he had no further fear or doubt about putting it into execution) sat down to the table and wrote the required cable gram.

"There!" he said, as he rang the bell, "that is done, my love, and now I'll go and look for Vera and send her to you—you will explain it all to her much better than I shall."

A few minutes later the door opened, and an exceedingly pretty, high-bred-looking girl, with dark expressive eyes, a delicate complexion, regular refined features, and a bright cheery expression, entered the room.

"Mother darling, what is it! Father says you want me, and have a piece of news for me. Tell me quick, I'm dying to hear it," she cried, brightly.

And throwing aside her broad-brimmed felt hat, and light cloth jacket, she sat down on a low chair close beside Mrs. Chesterfield, looking up with inquiring eyes into her face.

"Nothing wrong, darling mother, is there?" she asked anxiously, as she noticed a somewhat disturbed look on Mrs. Chesterfield's face.

"No—that is—your Aunt Violet's husband, of whom you have heard us speak, Tom Cassidy, is dead, Vera—"

"Oh! poor fellow, I am sorry; you liked him, didn't you, mother? I and, my cousin—"

"It is about her I want to speak to you, Vera. Tom begs us to give her a home till she is married—(she is engaged—or likely to become engaged very soon, it seems), and your father has just cabled to say we will do so."

"Oh! that will be lovely!" cried Vera Chesterfield, gleefully. "How good of father! How nice it will be for me to have a companion all ways, mother, won't it? Oh! I wonder what she is like!"

"We have heard very little about her," said Mrs. Chesterfield, thoughtfully. "Poor Tom was a very bad correspondent, but I remember your aunt used to write of her as being a lovely and most engaging child. If she resembles either of her parents I think we shall get on with her."

"And when did poor Uncle Tom die?" asked Vera.

"The letter is dated just six weeks ago—Feb. 20th—he was dying when he wrote it, and knew he could not last long. Viola has added a postscript written two days later, you see, simply saying her father died on such and such a date. Poor girl! it must have been terrible for her, for he says in his letter they had been only three weeks in Littleburgh, and had no friends near them."

"Yes, poor Viola," said Vera, sadly, "we must try and make her happy—cheer her up till Mr.—Mr.—what is the name of the gentleman she is engaged to—or going to be engaged to, mother?"

"Really, I—I don't remember. I don't believe Tom mentions his name, now I think of it," returned Mrs. Chesterfield; "look at the letter, dear."

"No; he doesn't. Well, she'll tell us herself, so it doesn't matter. We must try to cheer her up and make her happy till he comes. I hope he'll be nice, too, mother. I wonder what Cecil Hasted will say to it when I tell him."

And a slight blush rose to her cheek.

"If you are pleased, Cecil will be pleased, I'm

sure," replied Mrs. Chesterfield, affectionately, "and you are pleased, my love, are you not?"

"Oh, very pleased—delighted, mother," replied Vera, her dark eyes sparkling. "Will she be very American, do you think, mother? Not like those Miss Honeywells we met at Nice, though, I hope."

"All Americans are not like the Honeywells, my dear," said Mrs. Chesterfield, with a little shudder at the remembrance of two very advanced specimens of the Yankee girl they had met with on their travels. "Those Miss Brights were nice enough, I'm sure."

"Oh, yes. Besides, Viola is English really—not American. It will be very nice having her here, mother, and she will enjoy seeing England; when will she be here, do you suppose?" returned Vera.

"I suppose she will start as soon as she receives your father's cable," replied Mrs. Chesterfield, "and the journey, we think, will take at least a month. A long journey for a young girl to take alone."

"Oh, she is sure to meet friends, or to make friends on the way," said Vera, cheerfully. "Ah, there is Cecil with father. I'll go and tell him—or perhaps I'd better call him here."

She went to the window at the farther end of the room, and tapped on the pane. Cecil Hasted, a fine, manly-looking fellow of six-and-twenty, tall, good-looking, fair-haired and blue-eyed, came quickly across the lawn at her call. She opened the window and he entered.

"This is news, indeed, Vera," he said, and his tone of voice was not altogether joyful.

"Yes, a great surprise, isn't it?" she replied.

"Aren't you pleased?"

"Are you very glad?" he went on, in a low voice. "I'm not sure that I am."

"Why not?" she asked in surprise.

"Why—you know the saying, surely,—'Two's company—three's trumpery,'" he replied meaningly. "I'm selfish, Vera, I'm afraid; I like to have you all to myself, you see!"

She blushed and her eyes fell beneath his.

"I—we—that is—Oh, Cecil, I'm sure you will like her when you see her," she said, in a somewhat disappointed tone.

"Shall I! Well, perhaps—not that American girls are generally to my liking. But there, don't look so piteous, Vera, I'll try to like her for your sake, I promise you, and if—if she is like you, I'm sure I shall succeed."

"Thank you, Cecil," replied Vera, with a smile that amply rewarded him for his pretty speech, "it's very nice of you to say so."

"Nice! You know I mean it," he answered; "you know I think there is no one in the world to equal you, Vera. I am sure Mrs. Chesterfield agrees with me, don't you, Mrs. Chesterfield?"

"Well, if I say yes, you must remember that I am her mother, Cecil, and therefore may be prejudiced in her favour," answered Mrs. Chesterfield with a fond look at her daughter. "Now Vera, let us settle what rooms Viola is to have when she arrives. You are housekeeper, dear, so you must decide."

"I think the blue room, with the little sitting-room opening out of it, would be just the rooms for her," said Vera, eagerly. "The view from them is lovely, and they face south. Moreover, they are close to mine, and in the oldest part of the house, and Americans, they say, adore old houses, mother. She will like to think that her ancestress, Blanche Chesterfield inhabited those rooms three centuries ago."

"Perhaps she's afraid of ghosts!" remarked Cecil. "Americans are awfully superstitious; go in for Spiritualism, and all that rot, you know!"

"Ghosts! We have no ghost; not one at the Grange," replied Vera, "old and curiously built as it is. Our nearest ghost is in the haunted glen—half-a-mile away, Cecil. Viola will have no cause for being nervous, spite of the Grange being so old."

A very ancient building, indeed, was Chesterfield Grange; rambling and irregular, with tall chimney-stacks and quaint gables without, long rambling passages, winding stairs, odd corners, and strangely-shaped rooms within. Its principal reception rooms were as old as the time of Henry

the Seventh, and the entrance hall and dining-room were perfect specimens of the apartments of those days.

In later years, in the reign of Anne, a wing had been added to the older building, in which lay the morning-room and boudoir, Mrs. Chesterfield always occupied, and the furniture of which was that which had been placed in them by Lady Beatrice Chesterfield, more than a hundred years before.

A long picture-gallery connected it with the Tudor hall, and in the gallery hung portraits of deceased Chesterfields and their wives for many generations back.

It was a fine old country house, though situated in a wild and somewhat desolate part of L—shire, surrounded by thick woods, and at some distance from the nearest town.

Such as it was, however, the family, to whom it belonged, loved it, and Vera preferred to pass her days at the Grange rather than in town, even in the season, almost rather than in travelling; and she often was hard to say that to leave it would be the bitterest sorrow that could befall her.

"Newton Leas is not very far off, that's one comfort; you need never go far from it unless you wish, Vera," Cecil Hasted had whispered to her when she had so expressed herself one day.

"No, Newton Leas is quite close," she had faltered in reply.

CHAPTER II.

"This right for Churton!" said a sharp, shrill voice with an odd twang in it, just as the 3.5 train was leaving Euston for the North, and a hand was laid on the door of a closed carriage in which Cecil Hasted, who had been up in town for a day or two, was seated.

"Yes, this is right for Churton," he replied; "can I assist you in any way?" he added, as he glanced at the tall, thin woman wrapped in a long dust cloak and thickly veiled, who stood on the platform beside a pile of luggage. "You have a porter? the boxes are labelled! then you need trouble yourself no longer about them! Oh, excuse me, you have a friend to assist you"—as he glanced at a well-dressed man who was speaking to the porter who was removing the lady's belongings—"I fancied you—"

"I have no one with me, I am alone," she answered, hurriedly. And Cecil, who glanced again at the man he had imagined to be her companion, saw he had turned away and now stood at some distance from them.

"Allow me, then," he said, and assisted her into the carriage, and then helped the porter to hand in her various parcels, her sugs and umbrella.

"Thank you," she said, as she took her seat, speaking in a perfectly different voice, sweet and quiet instead of sharp and shrill. "This is my first journey in England, and I feel quite bewildered; it's all so different to what I've been accustomed to. You think my boxes will be all right? You haven't the check system over here; but they'll put them on the cars, and—"

"Oh yes," said Cecil, looking out of the window, "they are being put into the luggage-van now."

"Ah!" with a sigh of relief, as she sank back in her seat, "how long shall we be getting to Churton, sir?"

"Two hours," he replied; "a long run."

"Long!" she said, with a little low laugh. "Well, I guess you don't calculate length as we do. I call that real short, now! I shall be glad when it's over, though. I'm sick of travelling!"

"Come from abroad, I suppose. One of those Americans who are doing Europe?" thought Cecil, taking up a newspaper and beginning to read; whilst the lady, wrapping herself up more closely in her travelling cloak, and putting her rug carefully around her, settled herself in the corner of her seat as if she would sleep.

She was not sleeping, however, for more than once during the long silence that followed, Cecil caught her eyes fixed on him from behind her thick veil, with a sharp curious look.

"What sort of a person was she?" he wondered, young or old, pretty or ugly! All that he could be certain about was that she had an abundance of fair frizzly hair; long, thin, white hands, and, as far as the dust cloak would permit him to judge, a graceful figure.

Who could she be? Churton was not, after all, a very large place, and few strangers visited it—to whom could she be going?

The train sped on, and the lady lay back quiet and silent.

Cecil read his paper and thought of Vera, glancing every few minutes at his companion. Presently the train stopped and she started up.

"Is this Churton?" she asked in the harsh voice in which he had first heard her speak.

"No—Widdicombe," replied Cecil, "we shall be at Churton in twenty minutes now."

"Oh, thank you," she said, "do you go further than Churton?" she added in a slightly anxious tone.

"No, I get out there, I live above four miles from Churton," he answered.

"Ah! then you can tell me. Shall I be able to get a fly, or a carriage of any sort at the station in case my friends fail to meet me?"

"Certainly—there will be no difficulty about that," he answered. "I will see that you get one, if you require it."

"Thank you," said the lady, "you know the place very well, I suppose?"

"Yes, very well," he answered slowly.

"Ah, indeed!" she said, and then she relaxed into silence, Cecil taking up his paper again and showing no desire to continue the conversation. Why, he could not have told, but he had taken a strange dislike to his travelling companion.

At Churton she got out of the train quickly, and whilst Cecil was seeing her boxes removed from the van, she called a porter, and after a few words bade him get her a fly—her friends were not there to meet her, she told Cecil; he saw her into the conveyance, which she bade take her to the nearest hotel. Half-an-hour later, however, Cecil, in his dog-cart, drove past her just on the outskirts of the town.

"Where can she be going to by this road?" he thought, as he took the turning to Newton-Leas, "if she's going to Ayrington, she'll have a long drive. I don't envy her."

An hour later, just as the dressing bell was ringing, a fly loaded with luggage drove up to the door of the Grange.

"Who on earth can it be, my dear," cried Mr. Chesterfield.

"I can't imagine, indeed," returned Mrs. Chesterfield.

"Why, it must be—it is—Viola. I'm certain of it," cried Vera, and throwing open the drawing-room door, she rushed into the hall, followed by her father.

"But how the deuce can she have got across so quickly—my telegram only went ten days ago!" said the old gentleman.

"She must have come across without waiting for it, taken it for granted you would receive her, father," said Vera. "Yes, it is she."

As she spoke the occupant of the fly alighted, and entering the hall, threw back her veil.

"Uncle, dear Uncle Chesterfield," she said in a low voice—"it is you, I know—ah! this is Vera, I'm sure. I'm afraid I've taken you by surprise—I've come sooner than you expected. Oh! don't—don't say" (and she shrank back with a piteous look), "don't say you were not expecting me at all!"

"We were—we were—you're welcome, my dear Viola," cried Mr. Chesterfield.

"I'm glad you came off at once without waiting. Here is your aunt, she'll be delighted to see you. My dear (as Mrs. Chesterfield came into the hall), we are all so pleased to welcome you."

"You are very kind—very good," she answered, and there was genuine relief in her tone. "Dear Aunt" (as she kissed Mrs. Chesterfield and Vera, and wiped a tear from her eyes), "how can I thank you for your kind reception. I came off at once, for I was so miserable at Littleburgh, all alone after poor father's death. I couldn't stop there any longer, it was so wretched—I felt so—"

And her voice faltered.

"Of course—of course—you were quite right to start at once. Come into the drawing-room, my dear. Thomas will see to your luggage," said Mr. Chesterfield.

And he led the way into the drawing-room. Vera, with Viola's hand in hers, following, and Mrs. Chesterfield bringing up the rear.

"You had a good voyage, my dear, I hope?" said the latter.

"Yes, for the time of year—but I stayed in my cabin the best part of the time. I had no spirits to be much with others," she answered. "I'm really glad, thankful to be at the end of my journey, though."

"No doubt—it is a long journey to make—all alone, too. I daresay you found travelling alone very disagreeable," said Vera.

A smile passed over the face of the other.

"I'm accustomed to it," she answered, "and every one was very kind. Even coming down from town there was a gentleman in the carriage with me, who looked after my luggage for me and saved me all trouble."

"And now, Viola, won't you come up into my room and prepare for dinner?" said Vera, after a little more conversation had taken place; "it is past seven, and—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Chesterfield, who was always in a fidget if dinner were kept waiting. "Go and get ready; and she can tell us all her adventures during dinner. I'm sure she must be starving too! Off with you, young ladies!"

In about a quarter of an hour the girls returned; arm-in-arm, and for the first time Mr. and Mrs. Chesterfield got a good look at their niece, without the clinging dust-cloak or thick black veil concealing her.

She was tall and slim with a graceful, willowy figure—very pretty features—a pale complexion, and a mass of abundant fluffy yellow hair, which formed a curious contrast to her dark eyebrows, and the long dark lashes that fringed her brown eyes.

The expression of her countenance was shrewd and intelligent, and her smile bright. She looked several years older than Vera, and was of so utterly different a style that no one would have guessed that any relationship between the two girls was like'y.

The new-comer, pretty as she was, and possessing as she did a certain fascination of manner and appearance, was of a type strange to English eyes, and positively novel to the eyes of the inhabitants of the Grange.

She was well dressed, and her plain black gown fitted her perfectly. She talked easily and well, had used fewer Americanisms than might have been expected, and the harsh twang that Cecil had noticed, and which had fallen so unpleasantly on his ear at the station, was not noticeable in her voice, a very slight accent betraying that she was not English.

Mrs. Chesterfield watched her attentively during dinner, as she talked volubly with her uncle and Vera, and after the two girls had retired to bed, she turned anxiously to her husband.

"What do you think of her, George?" she asked, "she is not like poor dear Violet is she? and I don't see much resemblance to Tom Cassidy either, further than that she is fair and tall as he was. I confess I wish she had been more like her mother."

"She is a fine handsome girl though, clever too," replied Mr. Chesterfield.

"Say, woman, rather; but I suppose girls develop more rapidly in America than in England," said his wife. "She looks at least five years older than Vera."

"Yes, she does; but Vera is young for her age. She has seen much more of the world than Vera, poor girl, of course. She is pleasing and clever, I think, Kate, and has a good deal of *savoir faire*. She—"

"She is not at all like what you expected her to be though, is she, George?" returned Mrs. Chesterfield, thoughtfully, and a little uneasily. "I confess she is perfectly different to what I had pictured her—more showy and stylish (so use an expression I dislike), less refined and well-bred!"

cleverer, perhaps, and, well, I—I confess she puzzles me. I can hardly believe she is Violet's daughter."

"Who else can she be, my dear!" laughed Mr. Chesterfield.

"Oh! of course she is Violet's child, I don't mean to doubt it; but it seems strange that—well! Education and surroundings are everything with young people after all, and her education and surroundings have been so very different to Vera's, that one ought not to be surprised to find her different."

"Yes, she is quite unlike Vera; but one must not find fault with her for that, surely. She showed very nice feeling when she spoke of her father, and thanked us for receiving her. She has a good heart, I am sure!"

"Yes, yes, she seems grateful, and spoke very nicely," acquiesced Mrs. Chesterfield.

Meanwhile Viola and her cousin had had a long talk together in the blue-room, and Viola had expressed herself as charmed with her quarters, delighted with her uncle and aunt, and quite in love with her cousin.

"We shall get on splendidly, Vera, I guess," she said, as she kissed her before bidding her good-night. "I have lots—lots of things to tell you, and to talk to you about; but I must not keep you up any longer, it is so late. That is your room so nearly opposite mine, we are close together! that is nice. I shall sleep well to-night, I'm sure!"

No sooner was Vera out of the room, however, than Viola's sleepiness vanished. She locked the door carefully, and proceeded to survey the apartment and the little sitting-room that opened out of it carefully, then she went to the window, drew back the curtain and looked out.

The moon was shining brightly, and she looked around eagerly.

"A queer old place," she muttered, "three miles from Churton at least—very dull to live in I should say, and I guess they haven't many neighbours, and don't see much company. I reckon my stay here won't be lively! They are good old folk though, simple and honest, I reckon—kind and hearty too. I needn't be afraid of them, and the girl's not bad—rather nabby-pamby and sentimental, that's all. I guess that young chap I came down from town with is the Cecil she spoke of. She blushed when she spoke, so I suppose he's her sweetheart. What fools girls are to give themselves away, blushing. Well! I said he was awfully handsome, and ever so nice, and she's sure to tell him, and he'll be my friend for ever. I suppose he comes here pretty often so we shall soon meet again. Good Land! I'm tired. I'd like to have a cigarette but I suppose that's not to be done—oh, dear!"

And she stretched her beautifully rounded white arms above her head and yawned; then she undid the coils of her fair hair, which straightway fell around her in masses reaching far below her waist.

"It makes me look pale—a queer shade," she said to herself. "I want more colour."

For a moment or two she stood before the quaint old mirror, that hung at one end of the room, looking at herself complacently, then she turned away and began her toilette for the night.

"Cosy quarters at any rate," she thought as she got into bed. "I guess it will be my own fault if I don't have a good, comfortable time here, at any rate until" (and she smiled a queer, unpleasant smile), "until Jerome Blennerhasset comes over from Mexico for me—he won't be long before he does, I reckon—that affair of his is nearly settled."

CHAPTER III.

It was on the day but one following, that Cecil Haated rode over to the Grange, his visit to town had been on business, and the business having been satisfactorily concluded, he felt that the time for asking Vera Chesterfield definitely to become his wife, had arrived.

When he reached the house, and heard the sounds of silvery laughter mingled with the tones of a female voice he did not recognise, pro-

seeding from the drawing-room, he paused—it was unfortunate Vera should have friends with her that morning when he had so much he wanted to talk to her about, and then, rather put out, he walked into the room from whence the sounds came. He started as his eyes fell on Viola, and she, on her side evinced symptoms of considerable surprise.

"Cecil," said Vera, coming forward, "you didn't know she had arrived, did you? She came quite unexpectedly, a delightful surprise to us all, the night before last! This is Viola—What! you have met before!"

"Oh! don't you understand, Vera! It is he—the gentleman I told you of, who was in the train," said Viola, shyly.

"What! it was Cecil who came down in the train with you from London!" cried Vera.

"Yes, I had the honour of travelling down with Miss Cassidy," said Cecil, rather stiffly, bowing to her. "I had no idea my fellow passenger was your cousin, Vera!"

"No, of course you had not," said Viola, sweetly. "I'm glad to have the opportunity of thanking you again for your help, and of renewing our acquaintance."

And she held out her slender hand to Cecil, with a winning smile; he took it with rather a bad grace, and shook hands stiffly, ashamed of himself next moment for his coldness of manner when hers was so cordial, and when she was evidently disposed to be friendly and showed her pleasure at meeting him again so plainly; but he was vexed at her unexpected arrival—that she should have come before he and Vera had settled their affairs. He would so seldom see Vera alone now that her cousin was with her, and their long *tête-à-tête* walks and talks would be at an end; besides, he had not quite forgotten or got over the feeling of dislike with which she had at first sight inspired him.

As days passed on, however, it wore away, and Cecil felt ashamed of ever having harboured it.

Viola Cassidy won on his liking daily. She was so bright and sparkling, so clever and quick, besides being to all appearances so perfectly good-tempered, that it was impossible to belong in her company without feeling its effects.

Of course she was unlike Vera—not to be compared to her for a moment in fact,—but the poor girl had been all her life in an out of the way part of America, and could not be expected to be so refined and well-bred as her cousin.

She was pretty and pleasant, and tolerably well educated, however, and though she sometimes offended against the English rules of good taste, and occasionally against the rules of conventionality, she was hardly to be blamed for so doing, considering all things.

"She has the good taste to like some people I could mention more than they like her," said Vera to her lover, one day almost reproachfully. "You are positively ungrateful, Cecil; if you could only hear the terms in which she speaks of you! We all like her so much, that I really can't be sorry she has come over a little sooner than we expected. You don't *dis-like* her, Cecil, do you?"

"No; in fact I'm getting reconciled to her," he replied, as if he rather grudged making the admission; "but, well—we were more comfortable before she came, Vera. Nice as I allow she is, I prefer your company to hers."

Nice! Yes, everyone at the Grange thought the young American nice and charming, before a fortnight was over, and the girl began to feel in a manner that fairly astonished her towards her new friends.

"I never guessed they'd be so good," she thought to herself as she sat in her bedroom one night combing out her long yellow hair. "If I had a—a home, parents, like Vera has, I might have been a very different person to what I am! I mustn't get too fond of them, that would never do! Psha! what has come over me, that a few sweet words and kindly speeches should have made me feel so soft about them as I do! Well! I suppose in a couple of weeks Jerome Blennerhasset will arrive, and my way here will soon be over. Meanwhile I have found out nothing! they've never mentioned those stones! I must really discover all about them and let Jerry

know. I'm glad they're not Vera's property, that they're mine, or going to be. She's a lucky girl, is Vera, a good father and mother, and a lover like Cecil Hasted. I don't think I've ever met a man quite so nice as he is before! He didn't like me at first, but he does now. I could make him mad about me, I believe, if I chose, but that's not in the programme. I couldn't do with him, and I don't want to rob Vera of him, though I should dearly like to plague him a little for disliking me so at first! She'll be very happy at Newton Lees some day with him (and she sighed) happier I guess than I and Jerome will ever be together" (with an odd grimace).

Then she rose and looked at herself moodily in the glass, and after a careful survey of her features she drew a letter from her pocket and read it carefully, as if wishing to impress its contents on her memory, after which she retired thoughtfully to bed.

She was down in the breakfast-room early, and and there found Mr. Chesterfield seated before the fire, reading the paper, as she had expected.

"Here's a letter, for you, my dear," he said, handing her one with a foreign stamp on it.

Viola took it and uttered a little exclamation of apparent delight.

"Ah ha!" laughed Mr. Chesterfield, "I guessed as much—from Mr. Jerome Blennerhasset, I suppose! How you blush, my dear, I'm sure I'm right!"

"Yes, quite right, dear uncle," she replied. "Only fancy! in ten days or a fortnight he will be here—in England, I mean."

"And here at the Grange, I hope, for as long as it suits him to stay, my child," said Mr. Chesterfield, kindly. "By the way, Viola, what a funny girl you are! You have never asked me a word about your fortune yet—those stones you know—and here is Mr. Blennerhasset on the way home."

"Oh! I never thought about them, uncle," replied Viola, innocently, and heaving a little sigh.

"But I ought to have, and to have told you all about them," he answered. "I had them valued when they first arrived by a very good firm in London, Viola, and you are quite a little heiress, my dear. They are magnificent, worth fifteen thousand pounds at least."

"So much! Dear me! Over seventy thousand dollars, isn't it?" said Viola.

"Yes, did you ever see the stones, my dear?" he asked.

"No; but oh! I should like to see them, uncle," she replied with sudden interest. "My dear father (her voice faltering a little as it always did when she spoke of her father) took so much pleasure in collecting them, and there is one amongst them, he told me, that is quite unusually fine. When might I see them, uncle?"

"Well, we must be very careful of letting people know where they are, Viola, you know; but you can keep a secret of course," he replied.

"Where they are! Are they not here, then?" she asked, with a look of puzzled anxiety and surprise.

"They are" (in a low voice); "but I should not like it to be generally known, or one might have a visit from burglars, my dear," he replied; "they are in the iron chest in my study at this moment; but I shall send them to the Bank in a week or ten days for safety, I think."

"Oh! couldn't you keep them till Jerome, Mr. Blennerhasset, comes?" she cried; "surely they are safe enough here, uncle!"

"Yes, at present they certainly are, for no one knows they are here but you and I, your aunt and Vera," he answered.

"Oh, then there's no danger of our losing them! When will you let me see them, uncle?"—Vera! "as Vera entered. ("I may tell Vera, mayn't I?)" your father has promised to show us the diamonds! And she said the last words with a laughing air in a stage whisper.

"Oh, delightful! When, to-night?" asked Vera.

"Yes, to-night, if you like!" replied her father.

"Cecil will be here; but you won't mind him, of course!" returned Vera.

"Cecil! oh no, of course not," said Mr. Chesterfield. But a slight—a very slight look of annoyance passed over Viola's face, as if the idea of Cecil's presence did not please her. "To-night, when the house is quiet, and the servants all gone to bed, we will go into the study and open the strong box, and have a look at your fortune, Viola; you are anxious to see it, no doubt, before Mr. Blennerhasset—I may tell Vera, I suppose, Viola!"

"Oh yes!" replied Viola; but there was an odd ring of reluctance in her tone.

"Before Mr. Blennerhasset arrives; and he is on his way—"

"On his way, dear Viola! I am so glad!" cried Vera.

"And so am I; delighted, overjoyed!" said Viola, in a light tone, but her face betrayed no emotion of joy. "I hardly expected him yet awhile, you know, Vera; so it is a surprise to learn he is on his way to Europe already."

That evening, after prayers were over and all the domestics had retired to bed, the whole party repaired, as they had agreed, to Mr. Chesterfield's study.

It was a moderate-sized room at the end of a long corridor, on the ground-floor of the house, and looked out into the rose-garden, an unfrequented corner, which hardly deserved its name, for the rose-trees in it were few, and the corner ill kept; but a very comfortable room, indeed, it was, with the fire lighted and the curtains close drawn, it looked the picture of cosy comfort.

"Help me with the chest, Cecil, will you?" said Mr. Chesterfield; "the lid is heavy to lift. I keep the key locked away in the escritoire there, you see, Viola! and the key that opens the escritoire is always on my watch-chain."

He drew out his watch as he spoke, and with a key that hung, with several others on it, opened a drawer in the inlaid escritoire that stood on the side of the room opposite the fireplace.

Viola watched him carefully with a strange, sharp look in her face, which, as Cecil observed it, recalled to him her expression when he had first seen her at the station in London. Then Mr. Chesterfield opened the heavy iron chest, moved sundry packets and bundles of documents, and finally took out a small parcel and laid it on the table.

"Your fortune, my dear!" he said, as he opened it and displayed a collection of flashing, glittering gems to the admiring eyes of the young people.

"They are lovely!" cried Vera. "I never saw so many diamonds at one time in my life!"

"Splendid stones, I should say," echoed Cecil, looking at them admiringly, and wishing he had as good ones to bestow on Vera.

"Yes; they told me in town that they were perfect specimens. Viola, my dear, I hope you are pleased with them. What do you think of them?" said Mr. Chesterfield. For Viola had said nothing.

All eyes were turned on her as her uncle spoke and she did not reply.

She stood looking at the stones with an expression in her eyes that filled Vera with wonder and Cecil with instinctive repulsion, and which poor Mr. Chesterfield could not fathom.

The girl's face was transformed, her eyes glistened on the gems, her pale cheeks flushed, her bosom heaved and her breath came quickly, whilst her long white hands clasped and unclasped each other with an odd suggestive motion, it looked as if she would fain clutch the jewels, gather them up in her hands, had she dared to.

At length a long sigh broke from her bosom, and with a start she looked up and saw the eyes of all assembled fixed on her. She turned very pale and averted her face with a trembling frightened movement.

"They—they are very beautiful," she muttered "but—somehow, I don't care to see them—take them away, uncle, put them back in the chest—I feel as if they would bring me ill-luck. I don't ever wish to see them again."

"Ill luck! nonsense, my dear!" laughed Mr. Chesterfield. "I declare you really look frightened, Viola. What is it, my dear?"

"I—I am superstitious," she said, slowly,

recovering herself and speaking in her usual voice. "I can't tell you how bad the sight of those stones made me feel. They are beautiful though, very beautiful," and she looked at them once again, the same gloating expression—a look of intense covetousness coming for an instant into her face, "but I shall be glad when they are sold. Seventy thousand dollars, they are worth that every cent I'm certain!"

"Yes, I've no doubts they are," returned Mr. Chesterfield. "Well! I suppose I may put them away again, Viola!"

"Yes, yes, until Jerome comes, and then they can be sold," she said, hurriedly.

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Chesterfield, putting them slowly back into the case from which he had taken them and tying it up in its old wrappings, "this is the one they told me was such a fine specimen."

And he took up a large and brilliant stone, before closing the parcel finally.

"Yes, I remember poor father speaking about it—that must have been the one he means without doubt," said Viola, "here is the key of the chest, uncle," and she took it up and put it into his hand, "it has been very kind of you to show me the stones, but I shall be glad when they are safely put away again. Come, Vera, let us go."

"Dear Viola, you make me laugh," said Vera, "father will put the key away, and then we will all say good-night."

"There! I've finished," said Mr. Chesterfield, "that's the drawer I always keep the key of the chest in, and have done for the last forty years. Come along, children, and don't you be dreaming of ill-luck, Viola. Diamonds, they say, never bring ill-luck to any one."

"No, the only ill-luck is if one loses them!" laughed Cecil.

Viola shot a quick glance at him as he spoke. "Oh, there's no chance of that, they're safe enough here, till Jerome comes," she said.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHEN I hope this sort of thing won't go on for long, or I shall get soft—too fond of them all!" said Viola to herself as she lay back on the sofa in the cosy sitting-room opening out of her bed-room. "They're real kind, seem to have quite taken to me, somehow. Heaven help them! Vera is a darling! She and Cecil will be very happy (and her face softened wonderfully). She is worthy of him, if any girl could be, whereas I—if—if—"

And she paused, looking moodily before her into vacancy.

"Pshaw! what a fool I am, what an arrant idiot," she muttered presently with a scornful laugh, and pushing her fair, frizzled curls off her forehead. "What am I dreaming of! What business have I to dream! I've got to set; not dream now! What am I that an honest, honourable man—"

Her musings were here interrupted by a knock at the door, and Vera, with a cup of hot tea and a plate of hot cakes, on a silver tray, entered.

"I've brought you this, Viola dear," she said, sitting down beside Viola, "it will do you good, tea is always the best thing for a headache. You do look ill! Are you cold—would you like a fire? I'll call—"

"No, no! don't call anyone, Vera. I don't want a fire—I—Oh! how good you are to me. What makes you so kind, I wonder!" said Viola.

"Why, if we are good to you (I don't see that we are though, particularly) it is because we love you. Why do you look at me like that, dear? You know we love you, and you know how father and mother loved aunt Violet, they would do anything in their power for her child. What is it, Viola? (as Viola uttered a little cry, and turned her face in the cushion of the sofa) is your head very bad? Are you worse—"

"My head is really bad," she replied in a low, muffled voice. "I'll lie down and try to get to sleep. If I could get to bed at once, I'd sleep off the pain by morning."

"Very well! Shall I send Lisa to you?" asked Vera, pityingly.

"No! just as you like, dear. Cecil will be here in a minute. We dine at half-past seven, to-day, you know—he will be so disappointed at not seeing you, he likes you so much you know, Viola."

For Cecil's first feeling with regard to Viola had quite worn off, and he now shared in the general feeling of liking felt by his friends for her.

"Does he?" murmured Viola, a blush rising to her pale cheeks. "Ah! you are a lucky girl, Vera, for he loves you."

It was Vera's turn to blush now, but she made no reply to Viola's remark. She kissed her and helped to put on her dressing-gown and take down the coils of her luxuriant hair, then the second bell rang, and she hurried down to the dining-room.

"I shall look in as I go up to bed to-night," she said, as she left the room; "but I shall knock gently, and if you don't answer I shall know you are asleep, and shan't come in."

And off she ran.

When Vera left her, Viola did not proceed any further with her undressing. She coiled her long hair in a large knot at the back of her head, changed her blue cashmere dressing-gown for a dark-coloured robe, and sat down again in the armchair, where she speedily fell in moody thought.

"Only eight o'clock!" she said to herself, "what shall I do to pass the time away!"

For a minute or two she continued staring vacantly before her, then with a yawn, she opened a drawer in the table close to her, drew out a French novel, and with, to all appearances, but little of her headache left, began to read.

"Viola poorly! got one of her bad headaches. I'm so sorry, poor girl!" said Mr. Chesterfield, when Vera appeared at the dinner-table and apologised for her cousin's absence. "She looked very well this morning, I thought!"

"Exceedingly well!" said Cecil, "she had quite a colour, in fact."

"Is she feverish? I hope not," said Mrs. Chesterfield anxiously, "she is generally speaking very pale."

"No, I don't think she is feverish, I—I think she is fretting a little—thinking of her father, I daresay," replied Vera.

"Ah! poor dear; poor child, I daresay," said Mr. Chesterfield pityingly. "Mr. Blennerhasset will be here soon, now, and then she'll be all right, no doubt. Eh, Vera?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Vera demurely. "I wonder what sort of a man he is; he ought to be very nice if he is good enough for Viola."

"You like her very much then, my dear!" said Mr. Chesterfield.

"Papa! what a question; of course I do," answered Vera, "we all do, don't we?"

"Yes, I suppose we do! there is something very fascinating about her, though she is not a bit like what I expected her to be," returned Mr. Chesterfield. "Not one bit," he added reflectively. "Cecil, what have you been about all day," he went on, "and what is this particular business you want to talk over with me this evening?"

"I'll tell you afterwards—in the library, sir, if you don't mind," replied Cecil with a heightened colour, and a glance at Vera.

"Oh! oh!" said Mr. Chesterfield with a knowing twinkle in his eye, "it's a very private and important business, is it? Very well; we'll have a cigar together presently, and talk it over, Cecil."

After dinner was over and they had passed an hour in the drawing-room, Cecil and Mr. Chesterfield proceeded to the library, whilst Mrs. Chesterfield and Vera went upstairs together. Vera pausing and knocking softly at Viola's door when she left her mother's room, a quarter-of-an-hour later. There was no reply. Evidently Viola was asleep, and she passed on to her own room.

"It will be better not to go in, I might awake her," she thought. "As she says, she will sleep off her headache; it's the best way."

Mr. Chesterfield had made a pretty correct

guess at the subject on which Cecil Hasted wished to speak to him about. The business which Cecil had gone to town about a few weeks before, and which had been satisfactorily arranged, removed the only impediment that had stood in the way of his marrying, and had for awhile prevented him from asking Mr. Chesterfield for Vera's hand. There was now no reason for further delay, and before the two men had been long together, Mr. Chesterfield had given his full consent to the match.

"Provided, of course, Vera is willing," he concluded, "of that I cannot speak positively; but you can find it out for yourself, my boy."

"I think she will be willing, sir," returned Cecil with a happy confident smile, "I shall ask her to-morrow—and it won't do to be positive, but, I believe she cares for me, Mr. Chesterfield."

"And so do I," replied Vera's father.

And then till long past eleven o'clock, a late hour for a person of Mr. Chesterfield's habits, they talked over business matters, and then Cecil rose to go.

"They've all gone to bed—every one of them—good thing too," said Mr. Chesterfield as he saw Cecil off at the front door. "Good-bye, my dear boy, we shall meet early to-morrow."

"Yes, good night, sir," returned Cecil, and he heard Mr. Chesterfield shut and lock the massive door as he walked quickly away.

It was a bright starlight night, but the trees made the avenue dark and gloomy.

"I'd better cut across the park, go through the coppice and over the fields," he thought to himself, "it will save me a good mile. How stupid it was of me not to order the dog-cart to come for me! However, it's a fine night, and the walk won't do me any harm. I shall have to pass through the haunted glen, but I'm not nervous" (and he smiled). "I don't suppose, though, that any of the country-folk hereabouts would go through it at midnight at any price."

He walked quickly across the grass, and presently found himself in the coppice, passing through which he emerged into a deep grassy dell, dotted here and there with hawthorn bushes, and at the bottom of which lay a small dark lake.

Suddenly he started and then paused, his heart throbbing quickly. Distinctly he saw a dark-robed female figure fit quickly across the green sward at some little distance from him, and as quickly disappear in the shadow of a group of tall bushes.

"The ghost! by Jove!" he thought, then next moment he laughed at his own folly.

"A ghost! absurd," he thought. "Some village girl, who has been meeting her lover, I suppose, only it is odd that any rustic couple should have chosen this place of all others for their rendezvous. Who could it have been? The figure didn't seem quite unfamiliar to me—a tall, strapping lassie; and, oh! why I—"

He paused, as if struck with some sudden and bewildering conviction.

"No! of course it couldn't be. What am I thinking of!" he muttered to himself, continuing his walk quickly. "I must be a little crazy to-night, I think, and yet I—"

At that moment Cecil reached the lane that ran between the further end of the brambled glen, and the fields through which his pathway to Newton Leas led. He crossed the stile quickly, and stood for an instant looking down the roadway.

"Hallo! whom have we here, I wonder," he thought; "the Romeo whom the rustic Juliet I saw in the glen, had come to meet?" as he perceived a man clad in a long dark coat, and wearing a travelling cap well pulled down around his face, walking along the lane in the direction of Churton. "Who can he be, now? I don't recognise him a bit. However, it's no business of mine. Perhaps it's one of the gamekeepers; not that he looks that style of man either! Here I am!"

And Cecil vaulted over a fence into the field beyond the lane, across which his way led, and soon forgot all about the rustic Romeo and Juliet he had surprised, his head being full of thoughts of Vera and of the marriage.

Of course, and as Mr. Chesterfield knew full well would be the case, Vera accepted her lover's offer joyfully. She made no pretence of being surprised at it, nor did she stipulate for time to consider it and to make up her mind.

She accepted it frankly, and without any show of hesitation. Had not she and Cecil known each other all their lives? Was there, could there be a dearer more lovable fellow in the whole world? Of course she loved him! Oh! she was thankful for his love. And for the first time she realised what her life would have been like had Cecil not loved her, had he loved some one else instead of her.

"As if that were likely or possible," he said, reproachfully; "you must have guessed I loved you, surely, Vera darling, long ago."

"I—I hoped—I thought, perhaps you cared for me—a little," she faltered; "but I didn't know. Viola said you did, Cecil, and she is very sharp-sighted; and though I felt angry at her saying so to me, somehow, yet I was glad too."

"Viola!" cried Cecil with a start, as the remembrance of the figure he had seen the night before in the glen came back to him. "How is Viola to-day? Where—where was she last night?"

"Why I have you forgotten?" laughed Vera; "poor Viola went to bed early with a horrible headache, that was why she didn't come down to dinner."

"Had she a headache? Are you sure she went to bed?" asked Cecil, thoughtfully.

"Sure! Of course I'm sure. What are you dreaming about, Cecil?" laughed Vera. "I saw her just before dinner, and she was going to bed then; and when I went to bed she was fast asleep."

"Was she—well! It was a very foolish fancy of mine. I'll tell you about it, Vera."

And Cecil told Vera of what he had seen.

She laughed gaily.

"Oh! Cecil, Cecil, fancy you seeing the ghost! you who are so strong-minded and unbelieving," she cried.

"Of course it wasn't the ghost. I didn't imagine it was after the first instant," laughed Cecil, in reply.

"And then you fancied it was Viola! ha! ha! I shall tell Viola what you—"

"No, please don't; she might be annoyed," said Cecil, "promise me you won't!"

"I'll consider," said Vera, teasingly.

"No, promise. I would not vex her on any account," he replied.

"Well, I promise, then," said Vera. "Now are you content?"

"Yes, no, I shall be, if you'll give me a kiss to seal your promise," he answered, drawing her to him.

"You foolish boy!" she replied, blushing; "there, there!"

CHAPTER V.

"WHAT I going into Churton this afternoon, my dear Catherine, you and Vera!" said Mr. Chesterfield one hot day, a week or two later. Very particular business! I'm half afraid I can't come with you. I've had a twinge or two of gout, and—"

"Indeed, my dear, you must not think of it, I never expected you to," interrupted Mrs. Chesterfield. "Vera and I are going to do some shopping, and men are nearly always in the way when they go shopping with ladies, unless—"

"Dear uncle! as if auntie ever found you in the way!" said Viola carelessly. "However, I'm going to stay at home and take care of you. I've a little cold, and don't feel as if I cared to go out this hot day. Will you put up with my company till auntie and Vera return?"

"Put up with it! I shall be delighted to have it, my dear," replied Mr. Chesterfield. "So you're going to look after the wedding garments, are you, Vera, eh?"

"Not exactly, father," returned Vera with a blush. "I—mother is going to take me to town when we get those; to-day we are only going to get very ordinary uninteresting things, dusters

and tea-cloths and such like. I don't know what, exactly, but things of that sort."

"Oh! not the dress, I understand," said Mr. Chesterfield, laughingly.

"Why, uncle! fancy Vera getting her wedding dress in Churton!" laughed Viola.

"No—not her dresses, but there are plenty of things to be bought that she can get as well in Churton as anywhere, and I like to employ our local tradespeople as much as possible," said Mrs. Chesterfield. "Come, Vera, dear, the carriage is ready. Viola, I leave your uncle in your care. You are in good hands, my dear, and I shall feel easy about you. We are to meet Cecil in Churton, and will bring him back to dinner."

"Oh! he is to help select the dusters and tea cloths, then, is he?" laughed Mr. Chesterfield, as he opened the library door for the ladies to pass out. "Vera, my dear, I hope he has good taste in such things."

"What a tease you are, uncle dear," said Viola as the ladies drove off, and she returned to the library. "What! is your foot bad?" (as Mr. Chesterfield gave a wince and a groan) let me make you comfortable in your favourite armchair with the footrest."

She arranged the footrest, and placed a pillow for Mr. Chesterfield's head in the armchair, very deftly, and then she took her seat on the sofa, and taking up the newspaper, amused him by reading portions of it aloud to him, and by her pithy remarks on what she read.

"What have you there, Viola?" asked Mr. Chesterfield after a while, glancing at a small box she had placed beside her.

"That! oh, this box contains my collection of seals, uncle. I should like to show it to you," and her eyes shone strangely. "I have quite a number of seals. See how many I have got."

"You have indeed, child," said Mr. Chesterfield, surprised at the variety the box contained. "Where did you get them all, my dear?"

"Oh, from different friends," she replied. "Uncle" (and she assumed a coaxing tone), "I want to ask you a great favour."

"Ask away, my dear," said kind Mr. Chesterfield, encouragingly.

"Well, I don't know what you'll say, but I want you to let me make an impression of each of those beautiful old seals you wear."

And she pointed to a bunch of old-fashioned gold seals Mr. Chesterfield wore on his watch chain.

"Oh, is that all! you're welcome, child!" he replied good naturedly. "I believe this one—the large red carnelian—is a good specimen of stone engraving; it belonged to my grandfather, and is our coat of arms."

"Indeed!" said Viola, her face expressing much interest. "I should like to have an impression of it very much."

"This other," continued Mr. Chesterfield, "was my father's, and is our crest, and this was the seal my great grandfather always used for his every-day correspondence."

"How interesting," said Viola. "Let me see; he must have been my great-great-grandfather, then!"

"Yes—of course. Well! you are welcome to take an impression of each seal, my dear, when you choose," said her uncle.

"Oh, thank you, uncle," she cried, "I have sealing-wax here, in my box. I'll do it now, at once, if you'll let me. Can I have the seals?"

"Yes—certainly!" he answered, and began to try to take them off his chain.

"Dear me, I can't get them off, Viola. I forgot that," he said at last. "Never mind, I'll send for a goldsmith, and—"

"But why do that?" cried Viola, laughingly. "Give me the chain, seals, watch and all if you like, or just the chain. I can manage without taking the seals off it, uncle."

"Why, yes, of course, how stupid I am," said Mr. Chesterfield, sinking back into his chair. "Here—take the chain, my dear. Do you want a candle? There is one on the writing table, there, I think."

"Yes, and here are the matches," said Viola, going across the room to the table that stood by the window, and lighting the candle.

As she did so, the door opened and a servant came in.

Mr. Marsden particularly wants to speak to you, sir," he said to his master.

"Marsden! oh, of course. I forgot! I—I'll come to him. Where is he, James?" said Mr. Chesterfield.

"In the servants' hall, sir; and he's brought the lists you wanted to see," was the reply.

"Well, I'll come. You'll excuse me a moment, Viola, won't you?" said Mr. Chesterfield.

"Of course, uncle dear! But don't stand about too much, you know," she replied, in a curious, excited voice.

"No; I shan't be five minutes!" he answered.

"Well, then, I'll make my seals whilst you are away," she said smiling lightly, yet with a curiously anxious look in her eyes.

"All right!" he said, and hobbled away as if his threatened enemy, the gout, were overcoming him.

No sooner was he out of the room than Viola, casting a searching glance round her, drew something quickly from her pocket and bent for several moments over the chain and its appendages that lay on the table before her.

"There, that will do! It's correct enough, I think. How lucky that he should have been called away! Now for my great-great-grandfather's seal! Oh!"

And she started violently with a little cry as the window behind her was thrown up from the outside and Cecil Hasted vaulted lightly into the room.

"Did I frighten you, Viola?" he said, with a laugh. "I declare you're as white as a sheet!"

"Yes; you gave me a start," she said; and her voice was harsh and grating, reminding him of the time he had first heard it in town. "I—uncle, lent me his seals to make impressions for my collection. Look!"

And she pointed to the box containing her collection.

"What! you have a fancy that way, have you?" said Cecil. "Is that the Chesterfield coat of arms? Yes, very correct! You've made a first-rate impression of the seal; you seem a good hand at it, Viola! Now, I can never seal a letter without letting the wax drop, and leaving a great patch on the envelope!"

"Oh, practice makes perfect!" she laughed; but there was a nervous ring in her laugh. "See! I've made all these, and many more beside. Poor father (and she sighed) shared my fancy for seal collecting. There! I've done; and I think each of the impressions I have made is perfect. Look at them! Ah, here is uncle! Here is your watch, chain and seals again, uncle, and thank you so much! Here is Cecil! He gave me such a fright, bounding in at the window just now."

"No wonder—no wonder!" said Mr. Chesterfield. "Cecil, my dear boy, Vera and her mother expected to meet you in Churton!"

"Did they? I'm so sorry I missed them; but I left word at Greenways that I had ridden over here. How are you, sir—seedy! Not gout again?"

"Yes, it is, I fear," replied Mr. Chesterfield, ruefully. "Have you been successful, Viola?"

"Oh, very!" replied Viola, gathering up her treasures; "and as Cecil is here, and I dare say wants to have a chat with you, I'll take my collection upstairs again and put it away."

She rose to go as she spoke. As she did so something fell from her hand.

"You've dropped something, Viola," said Cecil, stooping to pick it up.

She was beforehand with him, however.

"Oh, it's nothing," she said, carelessly; "only a piece of white sealing-wax. Thank you very much, Cecil."

But somehow her hand was trembling nervously as she put the object she had dropped into her pocket.

It was rather late when Vera and Mrs. Chesterfield returned from Churton, and the latter was evidently tired; so Cecil took his departure soon after ten o'clock, and the whole family retired to bed early.

"See, Viola, what a lovely present Cecil gave me to-day!" said Vera, holding out her left

hand, on which shone a lovely diamond and emerald ring, to Viola for inspection; "isn't it pretty? I'm so fond of emeralds!"

"It's lovely! What a fortunate girl you are, Vera," she answered, looking almost enviously, a bystander might have said, at the glistening stones. "They must be worth a lot, Vera! Mr. Hasted must be very rich!"

"I believe he is; I don't know quite," replied Vera, something in Viola's remark displeasing her. "I don't care much whether he is or not. He—he cares for me, that is the great thing."

"Yes, of course," replied Viola, with a sigh; "you are fortunate every way."

"And—and Mr. Blennerhasset cares for you, Viola," said Vera, gently.

"What!—oh, yes! of course he does," returned Viola, in a pre-occupied way. "By-the-way, how time flies! he will be here very soon now, Vera; and—and I suppose before very long I shall leave you!"

"Dear Viola, we shall all miss you dreadfully," said Vera.

"You have all been very kind to me," returned Viola, dreamily. "In my whole life I have never been so kindly treated as you all have treated me. Afterwards—when I am gone—will you try to believe I loved you, Vera? Will you try to think of me as you have known me whilst I have been here?"

There were tears—real tears in her eyes as she spoke. Vera looked at her in surprise.

"Viola, don't talk so sadly, I shall always think of you with love and affection. Do you think I shall forget you, then, as soon as you are gone?"

"No, no," and Viola laughed oddly. "I don't think you'll forget me, Vera; but—there! I am an idiot," she added lightly, with one of her quick changes of mood, laughing gaily and brightly now. "I don't know why I get into the dumps as I do sometimes."

"You won't any more when Mr. Blennerhasset comes," said Vera. "I'm sure I should get into dreadful dumps if I were parted from Cecil as you are from him."

A cloud crossed Viola's brow as Vera mentioned Cecil, and her face flushed.

"Yes," she said rather coldly, "it would be a trial, no doubt. But you are one of Fortune's favourites, Vera, you will never be called upon to go through it. By the way, when is the happy day to be? Is the date fixed yet?"

"In about four months, I think," replied Vera, "and we are to go to Spain for our tour, or to Switzerland."

"Four months," said Viola, meditatively, "in four months I suppose I shall be in New York. Our wedding," and she laughed again, "will be a very quiet affair, and I dare say we shan't remain more than a week in England after it."

"No, but you will come over next year and stay with us, won't you?" said Vera. "I remember you promised you would."

"Did I—well, perhaps—if Jerome will let me," she answered, moodily.

CHAPTER VI.

A WEEK later, and a day or two before Viola (as she said) had expected him, Jerome Blennerhasset arrived.

"What do you think of him, Catherine, my love!" asked Mr. Chesterfield anxiously, after Mr. Blennerhasset had retired for the night, and Viola had gone to her room leaving the rest of the party in the library. There was anxiety and doubt in Mr. Chesterfield's voice, and he glanced inquiringly at his wife as he spoke.

"I—I have seen so few Americans, my dear," said Mrs. Chesterfield, evasively.

"And I, none," said Vera, "but I don't think Mr. Jerome Blennerhasset is half good enough for Viola. He's so—so common—so—"

"He's a cad," said Cecil shortly, looking angry and disgusted, "I thought Viola had better taste."

"We must remember he is not an Englishman," said Mr. Chesterfield, "he is loud and

self-assertive, certainly, I can't deny it, and, and—but his intelligent conduct—"

"Not polished—that is, not well-bred," interposed Cecil; "and more than that, there is something about him I don't like at all."

"His eyes," put in Vera, "are so shifty; he doesn't look at you when he's talking to you, but he seems to be watching everything that is going on around him, all the time, in a secret stealthy sort of way, you know."

"Yes, I shouldn't care to put my trust in him," said Cecil. "I'm sorry for Viola."

"Pooh, perhaps we don't understand," put in Mr. Chesterfield; "perhaps when we know him better we shall like him; we can't say much about him yet."

"He is certainly very different to what I expected him to be," sighed Mrs. Chesterfield; "if he were an Englishman I—I should say he was certainly not a gentleman; but, of course—"

"Ah! of course Americans must be judged by a different standard. Well, we found Viola not at all like what we had expected when she arrived; do you remember I but we have all learnt to love her since; and, perhaps, we shall learn to like Mr. Blennerhasset too."

But there was doubt in his voice, and Cecil shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid I shan't," said Vera. And, indeed, Mr. Blennerhasset was not at all the sort of man the Chesterfields had expected their niece's fiancé to be. Viola had spoken of him as a handsome captivating man; but they could see nothing in Jerome Blennerhasset to warrant her description of him. He was small and thin, though wiry and active-looking, with sandy-coloured hair and moustache, small, quick grey eyes, and very ordinary features. There was nothing taking about him.

As Vera looked at Cecil Hasted, and contrasted him with Viola's lover, she could not but feel the enormous difference between them and pity Viola from her heart. Was it possible she could really love Mr. Blennerhasset as she (Vera) loved Cecil?

Of course, after Mr. Blennerhasset's arrival Viola and Vera were far less together than usual. Mr. Blennerhasset kept Viola a great deal to himself, and often after an hour or two spent with him in the library or billiard-room Viola would join her aunt and cousin, looking worried and anxious—not at all, Mrs. Chesterfield thought, like a girl who had been in the society of her chosen husband should look.

"I—I can't make her out, mother," said Vera to Mrs. Chesterfield one day, who had commented on the disturbed look on her niece's face.

"I sometimes think she isn't quite happy—that she doesn't love Mr. Blennerhasset really. I heard them talking quite loudly and angrily the other day—I couldn't help hearing—as I passed the billiard-room, and I'm sure Viola had been crying when I went into her room last night. She always speaks of Mr. Blennerhasset as if she loved him and thought him perfection; but when they are together they are not a bit lover-like, and he is not a bit kind and attentive to her as Cecil is to me."

"Different people have different ways of showing their affection," replied Mrs. Chesterfield uneasily. "Your poor Uncle Tom, however, wrote as if he were well satisfied with Viola's choice, dear, and no doubt he knew Mr. Blennerhasset well."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, I hope she will be very happy," returned Vera.

But if the Chesterfields were not satisfied with their visitor their visitor was very well satisfied with his hosts, and with his quarters.

"You've been in clover all this time, Vi," he said to Viola; "having an easy time of it. You'll be sorry when we have to quit. The old man's a soft head, and the old lady's as sweet as pie. Vera's a smart girl now; but as for that darned young fellow Hasted, her beau, I can't stand him, the stuck-up brute! I'd like to get him for half-an-hour alone in—"

"Come, shut up, you can't appreciate an English gentleman, of course, how could you?" put in Viola, her face flushing and her eyes looking dangerously bright.

Whereupon Jerome Blennerhasset had made

certain sarcastic and pointed remarks, which had caused Viola's anger to burst forth, and hence the traces of tears that Vera had seen on her face.

The post arrived at the Grange about nine o'clock every morning and each day since his arrival Jerome Blennerhasset had been in the hall to meet it, as if eager for letters.

"I left a great deal of business doing at home when I came across, you see," he said to Mr. Chesterfield in an explanatory way, who found him one morning apparently watching for the postman, "and I'm anxious for letters."

As he entered the hall one morning at the usual hour his eyes fell on a letter with an American stamp and postmark that had at that moment arrived, and been placed with others on the hall-table. He gave a start as he saw it, and taking it up slipped it quickly into his pocket.

"Just in the nick," he muttered, and his lips were white as he spoke the words. "Hope no one has been here before me; the old people haven't come downstairs yet, though. I guess I'm all right. I'd best read this letter right away, I'm thinking."

And he walked out into the garden, tore the letter open hurriedly, and read its contents.

His face filled with anxiety as he did so.

"Holy Moses! we must hurry up—I must tell Vi so—no time to lose. If I hadn't come in just when I did there'd have been the deuce to pay. It's all right though; but it was a near shave."

"Father, wasn't there a letter from America for you?" said Vera, when Mr. Chesterfield came into the breakfast-room.

"For me—no, my dear," replied her father; "at least, I've not seen one."

"But I saw it—lying in the hall," replied Vera.

"Are you sure it was for Uncle?" said Viola, who looked pale and spiritless that morning. "Jerome had a letter, now, from his brother, wasn't that the one you saw?"

"No, I don't think it could have been," said Vera, in a puzzled tone, "I saw father's name on it."

"Yes, of course—like this, I guess," said Blennerhasset, drawing an envelope from his pocket. "You see they put your father's name very big, and mine very small here in the corner."

And he tossed the envelope across the table to Vera.

"Oh! I see. I dare say I made a mistake. I didn't mean to offend you, Mr. Blennerhasset," said Vera in surprise, for Jerome was looking black and ugly.

"Offend him! my dear Vera," laughed Viola; "is that possible?" and Jerome joined in the laugh, though with rather a bad grace. "Jerome's not a bit touchy dear, I assure you."

But Jerome looked grim, and was silent for the rest of the meal, giving a sigh of relief when it was over; and he pushed back his chair from the breakfast-table.

"Come and have a game of billiards, Vi!" he said, turning to leave the room.

"I—I can't this morning," she answered abruptly. "I'm going out with Vera."

"Oh! don't mind me if Mr. Blennerhasset wants you," replied Vera.

"He doesn't really want me," said Viola; "we can have a game any time."

"But I do really want you, Vi," replied Jerome with a peculiar look in his small grey eyes. "I've something—a letter—I want to talk over with you, and which will interest you."

"Oh, very well; in that case I'll be with you in a moment; but why didn't you say it was about a letter you wanted me, instead of a game at billiards you wanted me to play?" she replied lightly.

"I want you for both. Come along," he answered, impatiently, almost rudely.

And, with a grimace, she followed him.

"They've been quarrelling again, I feel certain, Cecil," said Vera, sadly, an hour later. "Viola looked wretched when I met her just now. Oh! I do wish she'd give up that horrid man. I'm sure she does not care for him, and is only going to marry him because she fancies she ought."

"I dislike the fellow more and more every day," replied Cecil. "How your poor Uncle Tom

could ever have spoken of him in the terms he did in his letter which your father showed me I can't imagine—it's a perfect mystery to me!"

That evening Cecil Hasted was dining with some friends who lived about a mile from the Grange.

Riding home, a misfortune befell him; his horse, a young and nervous animal, shied, put his foot into a rabbit hole and fell, throwing its rider with some violence to the ground.

The fall was not the worst part of the affair, however. Cecil rose, the worse for it only by a severe shaking; but the horse was strained so severely that it could not rise from the ground, spite of its frantic efforts.

"Poor brute! I fear its shoulder's slipped, he'll have to be shot," thought Cecil, and then he thought him of how he could obtain help, and where.

"I'm close to the Grange. I'll run across the park to the stables and rouse up Coulson, the groom; the poor beast must be attended to or put out of its pain; he'll help me," he decided.

And off he set at full speed towards the Grange.

As he neared it, intent on getting the help he required and awakening Coulson without awakening anyone else, he was surprised to perceive, late as it was, a dim light burning in the library.

"Mr. Chesterfield up still, how strange! why it's past twelve, or is it that Blennerhasset! he's not given to sitting up late, though—By Jove! who's that!"

And he stood stock still beneath the shadow of a large tree, peering into the semi-darkness (for there was no moon) with all his eyes, for dark as it was, he had distinctly seen the figure of a man steal across the grass toward the window of the library, from whence a dull ray of light proceeded.

Then the window was slowly and cautiously pushed open from within, and the man entered.

For one moment Cecil paused, the next he was running as fast as his legs would carry him towards the stables.

"Thieves," he muttered; "I must rouse the men at once. It's those diamonds of poor Viola's they're after, I'll be bound."

CHAPTER VII.

"Rouse up, Coulson, sharp, and awake the others," said Cecil, who had fortunately succeeded in awakening the head-groom without much difficulty. "There are thieves at the Grange—make haste!—no noise. If we are quick and cautious we may capture the whole boiling of them. Send off old Piers to the village for the policeman and then follow me."

Thieves! In less than three minutes every man and boy in the Grange stables was up and on the alert, and presently Cecil, with a following of four, was on his way to the house.

The library window was still ajar, and from within, as they crept cautiously up to it, came the low sound of carefully suppressed voices—a woman's voice amongst them, as Cecil, with a bewildered feeling—half astonishment, half dismay became aware. Peering into the room he perceived two men, and in the darkest part of the apartment a third person, whether man or woman he could not exactly determine.

The escritoire was open, and one of the men was bending over the iron safe, the lid of which was raised, the other, holding a small lantern aloft so that its rays fell on the contents.

"They are there—somewhere," said a voice that made Cecil start; "down below all those papers," said another in sharp accents, that he remembered well.

The man who was bending over the safe, with his back towards the window, flung a bundle of papers impatiently on the floor, with an oath.

"Where? I don't see 'em," he growled.

Cecil waited no longer, but with a sign to his followers dashed through the window into the room.

"Take care, sir, for Heaven's sake, they're armed," cried Coulson, as the click of a revolver was heard.

But the warning came too late. Coulson sprang forward to knock up the arm of the man who held the pistol in his hand and had pointed it at Cecil, but before he could reach him there was a flash and a ringing report, while at the same instant someone rushed forward and threw themselves between Cecil and his assailant, and fell with a deep groan at his feet.

Then the light was dashed to the ground; there were blows and a scuffle; a crashing of broken glass and overturned furniture; and when a light was again struck it disclosed Cecil supporting Viola in his arms, from whose bosom a stream of blood was flowing; whilst, in the corner, Coulson and another groom were holding down a dark-haired, savage-looking fellow, a stranger to all.

"He's escaped, sir!" panted Coulson; "the American, who's been here all this time; Blennerhasset, as he calls himself. He fired the shot, and he's off!"

"He!" cried Cecil, "and he has shot her!"

Voices and shouts were now heard without. "Ah! they've got him!—Piers and the constable. He must be runned into 'em, almost!" cried a stable-help.

And he was about to rush off to aid in the capture, when Cecil stopped him.

"A doctor! Go for the doctor at once! she's dying!" he cried. "Never mind the thieves; it's Miss Cassidy; they've murdered her! That American brute did it. He meant to kill me, but shot her instead."

By this time all in the house were thoroughly aroused; and Mr. Chesterfield, followed by the butler and footman, appeared on the scene.

"Cecil—Viola! Good Heavens! what has happened!" he cried. "And—Blennerhasset!" as the policeman and Piers entered, dragging the American, covered with blood (for he had fought desperately for liberty, and drawn a knife on his captors), into the room. "Who has done this! Great Heaven! she's wounded—dying!"

"The doctor!" repeated Cecil. "She may be saved yet. He did it!"

And he pointed to Jerome Blennerhasset, who stood handcuffed, with a dogged sullen expression on his swollen blood-stained face, looking indifferently on, whilst the other man, his accomplice, cowered and trembled in the corner, moaning occasionally and trying to twist himself from the strong grasp of Coulson, who held him securely, whilst the younger groom fastened his hands behind him with a leathern strap.

"Let us get her away from this; upstairs—gently! Help me a moment."

And, raising Viola in his arms, Cecil bore her upstairs to her own room, where Mrs. Chesterfield and Vera presently joined him at her bedside.

"How did it happen, poor, darling Viola!" said Mrs. Chesterfield, a little later. "How came she there? I can't understand it; and Mr. Blennerhasset—"

"You must prepare yourself to hear a very painful and extraordinary tale, I fear, Mrs. Chesterfield," replied Cecil, sadly. "I hardly understand it myself yet; but it is only of her life I am thinking now. Remember, whatever you may learn, that she saved my life; the shot that struck her was intended for me. She threw herself between me and the man who fired it—the man we have known as Jerome Blennerhasset!"

"You! it was meant for you!" cried Vera, clinging to him in horror. "Oh, Cecil!"

"Yes, and she saved me!" he answered, his voice choked with emotion; "I owe my life to her!"

"Oh! how good—how noble of her!" cried Vera. "I shall never forget it, Cecil."

"No, do not, dear, poor soul! We shall find we have much to forgive her, I expect; so do not forget we owe her that, Vera. Ah! here is the doctor; perhaps he may be able to save her yet."

But when the doctor had examined the wound he shook his head gravely.

"She cannot live," he said, sadly; "this has been a terrible piece of work! You have the man safe who did it!"

"Yes; he was caught whilst trying to get

away; just after he fired the shot," said Cecil; "and his companion is in custody as well as he!"

"Ah, that's right; very satisfactory!" said the doctor.

And though he would have given a great deal to understand the real cause of the catastrophe, like a wise man he asked no questions. Everything would be made public property at the inquiry which must necessarily follow he knew, and then his curiosity would be satisfied. At present his patient's state was all he need think about.

Very slowly, and not till several hours had passed, did Viola regain consciousness, open her eyes and look around.

"Where am I?" she muttered, in a half-dazed manner; then, with a look of intense anxiety, she added, "Cecil—is he safe?"

"Yes, darling Viola, you saved him!" said Vera, coming forward and trying to take her hand; but Viola turned her head away, and tried feebly to withdraw her hand from Vera's clasp, shutting her eyes again with a shivering sigh.

"Don't," she murmured; "don't touch me; how you will—must—hate me!"

"Hate you! when you have saved Cecil's life!" replied Vera, gently. "Never, dear! how could I!"

But Viola made no reply. It seemed as if she did not hear what Vera said, and that consciousness was again about to leave her.

The doctor looked grave, and signed to those around to be silent or leave her.

"She must not talk," he said; "later on she may be able to say a few words without danger to herself, perhaps; or she may never be able, I can hardly say yet; an hour or two will decide it."

"I picked up a lot of these things on the library floor by the safe, sir," said Coulson to Mr. Chesterfield, early next morning, "there be some in a parcel lying on the ground, too. So I didn't throw these away, thinking maybe they're of consequence."

And he put half-a-dozen or so of glittering stones into his master's hand.

They were some of the diamonds Tom Cassidy had sent home—Viola's portion.

"Cecil was right," he thought, as he hastened away to the library to search for and gather up the rest, a search in which the bright rays of the morning sun, which shone into the library, aided him very effectually.

"It was to possess themselves of these diamonds the thieves came here. How wrong I was to keep them in the house. If I had acted like a sensible man I should have sent them to the bank at once, and all this would never have happened. I can't understand it now, though. Why should that horrid fellow have wanted to steal the diamonds? Unless—yes—that's how it must have been (and his face lengthened), he wanted to get the diamonds, make off with them, and throw her over. Ah! I believe I've hit on the right explanation of the matter."

And he propounded his new theory to Cecil.

"Viola must have heard a noise and come down, and caught them in the act, just as you, too, came on the scene, and just in time to save your life," he said.

"It may be so," replied Cecil; "we shall hear the rights of the story soon, no doubt."

But he looked very grave and sad as he spoke; he knew well enough that Mr. Chesterfield's theory of the robbery would not hold water, yet he refrained from saying anything to disturb the relief it evidently afforded him.

"I—I'll send those diamonds off at once," he continued with a sob in his voice; "poor dear girl! she'll find a worthier man on whom to bestow herself and her portion than that wretch there, some day."

"If she lives," said Cecil sadly.

"Yes, of course, but she will. What does Granger say? I must see him if he is here."

And Mr. Chesterfield stole back to the room where Viola was lying, Cecil following him.

It was morning, and the curtains of the window were drawn back, so that the light fell on Viola's insensible form, making her pale face look yet paler and more ghastly. The birds chirped and

twittered in the trees without. Vera could hear the lowing of the cows in the meadows, and the tinkling of sheep bells on the hills in the distance, whilst the merry whistle of a cart driving his horses to the fields fell on her ears. Everything without was peaceful and fair, everything unchanged, but within all was altered—all was woe and misery, and Viola's young life was ebbing fast away; in a few hours and she would be with them no more—all would be over. Mr. Granger had told them so; there was no hope!

Suddenly Viola's eyes opened, and she looked anxiously around as if wondering to see them all standing by her bed. Then a sudden rush of remembrance seemed to return to her, and a terrible expression spread over her face.

"Viola, my dear niece," said Mrs. Chesterfield gently, "what is it?"

The girl looked at her with eyes full of shame and horror, wide open, staring, and full of anguish.

"Who speaks to me?" she said, hoarsely, with labouring breath.

"It is me—your Aunt Kate, my dear," she replied. "Vera and I."

"My Aunt Kate—your niece Viola," she said, struggling for speech. "No—I am not your niece—you are not my aunt—Vera, no—I am not raving—I speak the truth, I am dying, I know it—I am not Viola Cassidy, I am not your cousin—your niece. I am a —"

A gush of blood flowed from her lips as she said the last words—she struggled hard to continue, but it was useless; her eyes, full of a terrible eagerness, were fixed on Mrs. Chesterfield's face—then the light suddenly died out of them, and she fell back, a corpse.

CHAPTER VIII.

Not Viola! then who was she? and where was the real Viola—when would the mystery be cleared up!

A terrible uneasiness and doubt filled the hearts of Mr. and Mrs. Chesterfield. Was the dead girl in her right mind when she denied her relationship to them, or was she wandering deliriously?

It was a hard point to determine; but there were many things that pointed in the direction of her extraordinary avowal being the truth. Cecil, who was perfectly aware that Mr. Chesterfield's theory of Viola's having come into the library and surprised the burglars at work was not tenable, fully believed it was so.

From the man calling himself Jerome Blennerhasset and his companion no information could be obtained; both kept up a resolute, dogged silence, refusing to answer any questions put to them, or to throw any light whatever on what had passed.

"There is one thing, however," sobbed Vera, as she sat with her mother in her own morning-room, "I don't know, we can't be sure, whether she was Viola Cassidy or not, but I shall always remember that, be she who she may, she saved Cecil's life. If it had not been for her he would have been lying dead upstairs—instead of her. Oh, mother! think of that."

And Vera shuddered and hid her face in her mother's shoulder at the dreadful picture her words conjured up before her.

That evening, just as the family were sitting down to dinner, in a very sad, depressed state of mind, Mrs. Chesterfield so nervous that the least sound startled her, and Mr. Chesterfield in much the same condition, a carriage drove up to the door.

"Who can it possibly be, some one from Scotland Yard?" cried Mr. Chesterfield starting up with alacrity; and as the great bell at the entrance door of the Grange sounded loudly the whole party left the dining-room and hurried into the hall.

A carriage loaded with luggage stood before the door, and a tall, broad-shouldered man was helping a small, slim girl to descend from it.

As he turned towards the steps and the light fell on his face Mrs. Chesterfield gave a cry of astonishment, and Mr. Chesterfield with an exclamation of intense surprise exclaimed,—

"Why, gracious Heavens! Is it—can it be! Yes—by Jove—it is—Tom Cassidy—Tom Cassidy, alive and well!"

"Yes, certainly, thank Heaven," replied the new-comer, with a jolly laugh; "and how are you, George, and you, Catherine!—why, you all look astonished to see us. Weren't you expecting us then? Didn't you get Viola's letter?"

"No! we—that is—why Tom we've believed you dead this three months," cried Mr. Chesterfield, in a bewildered way, shaking hands with his brother-in-law vigorously, whilst Mrs. Chesterfield and Vera were busy making acquaintance with the shy delicate-looking girl, his companion.

"Dead! Why how was that? I got quite well at Vahilos! I wrote to you myself from there. (Mr. Chesterfield shook his head.) What! you didn't get the letter! But I wrote again before I left New York to tell you we were coming over—you ought to have got that letter anyway. You—you got the diamonds all right!" he added in a low voice, a little anxiously.

"Oh, yes! they're safe and in the bank now, thank goodness. But come in, come in, we've a strange story to tell you, but it must be told later on. I am thankful what we were told was wrong—a mistake."

"Heard that I was dead, did you?" replied Cassidy. "Rumour Ned, as usual, you see, George, and how about Viola then, eh?"

"We—we believed Viola—but, there! till after dinner I won't say a word. Perhaps after you have heard our story you'll be able to explain what is puzzling us. So this is Viola, she is like what we expected our niece to be—eh, Catherine!"

"The image of her mother, is she not, Catherine!" sighed Tom Cassidy, looking fondly at the pretty, blushing girl beside her. "Reminds me of my darling wife every time I look at her."

"Yes; she is indeed like Viola," said Mrs. Chesterfield, putting her arm kindly round her niece. "George, how could we have been so—so deluded! And yet I—I often doubted!"

After dinner, and when the Chesterfields had a little recovered from the surprise and joy the arrival of their brother-in-law and his child had caused them, Mr. Chesterfield related the strange story of the advent of their supposed niece from America; the subsequent appearance of Jerome Blennerhasset (the new Viola started and crimsoned at the mention of his name, and uttered a cry of surprise; but her father held up a warning hand to her to impose silence), and the event of two nights before.

"And she is dead," cried Cassidy. "Unfortunate woman, whoever she may be."

"And he calls himself Jerome Blennerhasset, uncle," said Viola. "Why Jerome—our—my Jerome is in London (with a bright blush). "We—we were going to ask you if—"

"Oh! why didn't you bring him down with you! You must write and tell him to come at once," exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield. "Did you write? why I believe I—I never read my letters yesterday, I was so distracted, so frightened, so upset—"

"Of course, dear aunt. To think of all the trouble and anxiety we have caused you," replied Viola. "I—I'll write to-morrow, if I may."

"And who has been posing as Jerome Blennerhasset, and who is the girl who pretended to be Viola, I wonder," said Mr. Cassidy in a musing tone. "By Jove! I have it I believe, Viola. I'll bet my last dollar those Moores are in it—that girl and her blackguard brother, Estelle Moore and Jake."

"Tall, fair," began Mr. Chesterfield—

"Tall, sandy haired, hardly fair, pretty figure and manner," said Cassidy.

"Estelle Moore! impossible!" cried his daughter.

"Not at all impossible. I believe I've hit the right nail on the head. I was taken in by her at first, I own, with her soft, fawning, flattering ways, and sweet smile. But the brother, a short,

thin, sandy-whiskered chap, was too awkward to deceive me for long; a regular ruffian, a bad lot. I only wonder a respectable man like Horton," and Mr. Cassidy stopped short.

"I never liked or trusted Mr. Horton," said Viola, gravely. "But Estelle had plenty of good in her. I pitied her."

"Yes, yes; she saved Cecil's life," said Vera. "I shall never forget it."

"We can easily prove if your suspicion is correct," said Mr. Chesterfield. "The poor girl—she is to be buried on Thursday—you can see for yourself."

An hour later Mr. Chesterfield, whose eyes were full of tears, and Tom Cassidy, who looked very grave and sad, came into the library.

"There is no more doubt, my dear Catherine," said Mr. Chesterfield. "Tom recognised her at once. She is the Estelle Moore he knew in California. We have nearly been the victims of a very cleverly laid plot to rob us of the diamonds Tom sent over to my care. It seems both the Moores knew of them, and the postscript in the letter announcing Tom's death is not in Viola's handwriting. Tom's letters to us must have been intercepted."

"The one from New York was no doubt coolly taken from the hall table by that fellow who called himself Blennerhasset," remarked Cecil. "Don't you remember, Vera! And the figure in the Glen!" he added.

(Continued on page 480.)

LEILA VANE'S BURDEN.

—101—

CHAPTER XXI.

MUCH as she had always loved and welcomed her mother, Madeleine Sylvester had never been more truly glad to see the well-known comely face, and hear the familiar voice, than on the occasion of Mrs. Sylvester's short visit to Wavetone.

The girl was very brave, so brave that at times she almost deceived herself and found herself thinking that she must have been mistaken in the depth and true nature of her feeling for Julian, so easily did her brightness and courage sit upon her; nevertheless Margot had a sort of return to her old childish habit of longing for her mother's presence to comfort and to soothe her when the first sharp pain had passed.

She sat a long time watching the sails of the boat which was carrying Leila, she knew, not only over the smooth bosom of the sea, but to a great epoch in her life—the turning-point, it might be, of the girl's whole career.

There was nothing but sweetness in Margot's thoughts as she sat there. The sweetness was tinged with sadness, but it was not bitter, and Margot felt for herself just as she felt for Leila, that this hour would be productive of change, if not rapid, at least lasting in the lives of them both.

She rose resolutely after awhile, and went indoors to speak to Giles Bernadine before going to the station to meet her mother. Margot was conscious of being vaguely grateful for the presence of this young man.

His white looks and weakness appealed to her womanly nature, and gave her mind, and even her heart, some occupation. Margot would have been tremendously surprised could she have guessed how great an impression her gentle sympathy was making upon Julian's cousin. She thought of him only as one who needed her ministrations, and she had a great respect and admiration for one who had come through such an ordeal as he had endured with so much dignity, and such a regard for honour. She was looking rather a pale wistful likeness of her bonny self as she stood on the railway-station and waited for her mother.

Mrs. Sylvester's shrewd loving eyes noted all this in an instant, and her heart had a silent pang as she felt that her dear child was passing through a dark hour which no hand, not even hers, could help to lighten or make less hard.

She held Margot to her heart a little more warmly than was her wont.

"I have come to see what mischief you are up to, you young women!" she said.

Margot laughed.

"Now confess. Some fairy (a wicked one too!) must have told you that two beautiful young men have come down to rescue us from the perils of Wavetona."

"So Julian and his cousin are here! I guessed as much. Margot, am I to trust my life and limbs to that awful fly?"

Margot laughed again.

"You are! It looks dangerous, I admit, but it really is not as bad as it looks!"

"There are some great mysteries in life, and this is one of them!"

Mrs. Sylvester settled herself gingerly in the decrepit village cab as she made this remark. She was determined by every means in her power not to let her child see that she had noticed any difference in her looks.

"You ought to know this mystery well by this time," Margot said, as she climbed in too, "for I am sure it has been in existence ever since the first time we came to Wavetona. Marshall! I am so sorry there is not room for you—do you mind waiting, we will send the fly back to you!"

Mrs. Sylvester gave one of her characteristic grunts.

"If Marshall is wise she will not risk her life as I am doing," she said, and then with a few kind words to the maid, who had been greeted by Margot as an old and valued friend, the mother and daughter were soon rumbling along the dusty road towards the hotel.

"It is good to see you, mother dear," Margot said as they were alone. She stretched out her hand, and Mrs. Sylvester caressed it fondly for a moment.

"I felt a longing for some sea air, and I wanted to be quiet for an hour or so. I shall be full of business now—Cis is going to be married at last!"

"Cis is engaged—really—to—"

"To Mr. Langton. It surprised me a little, though not much," Mrs. Sylvester said calmly. "I have been so well prepared for astonishments in my life; but I fancied my Cis was going to fly at higher game."

"Oh! he is charming, mother. I like Toby Langton so much. I know he adores her, too, she ought to be very happy. Dear Cis, I must write to her at once. How did it happen, mother? I thought she was going to be silly about that dried up old man."

"The dried up old man saw things in a different light to what Cis did. He was glad to amuse himself with a pretty girl, but he never forgot he was a peer and a middle-aged man; he had no matrimonial intentions, whatsoever. Toby, on the other hand, was full of these intentions, and the matter was settled, I think, before Cis had time to change her mind. Matrimony seems distinctly in the air at Wilton Crobie just now. Mrs. Sylvester finished with a touch of significance in her voice.

Margot looked at her uncertainly.

"You mean something by that, mother dear, do you not?" she asked in a gentle way.

Mrs. Sylvester nodded her head.

"I mean a good deal, my dear. I mean that if Julian Bernadine does not make haste and return to his mother he will find when he does return that his place as her protector, adviser and companion is usurped by another, and a very different man to himself."

"Mother, darling!"

Margot could say no more than that. She understood the situation in an instant, it amazed her into absolute silence.

"I assure you I am only telling you what is not merely possible but certain, unless Julian puts his foot down very strongly. I felt there was some new danger in the air," Mrs. Sylvester said

meditatively, "when Eustace Vane came and took up his quarters so near to Wilton Crobie, and after he had paid me over that money in the most superbly grandiloquent manner possible I was sure of it. Margot has been bewitched that foolish woman. What devil is in the man that he can play such pranks as he does with such impunity and impudence!"

Mrs. Sylvester uttered this last sentence almost testily.

Margot had grown paler than before at the future possibilities raised up ahead by her mother's news.

"It seems too absurd," she said, when she could speak, "and yet it is terrible, too, it will be such a blow to Julian; and think of Leila. Mother, surely that man has done enough wrong in his life! must he come forward now and snatch her happiness from her just when it might be so possible, so near!"

"Julian is an exceptional character; he will know how to deal with Eustace Vane. I hope he will teach the scoundrel a lesson he ought to have been taught years ago!"

"But" Margot paused, her eyes went out to the sea. Far, far away in the distance, she could see the white sails of that boat gleaming in the sunshine like a large bird; her woman's instinct whispered to her something of the story that was passing within that boat at that very moment, "but mother," she said slowly, almost sadly—the sadness for them not for herself—"it is not only of Julian's horror of this I am thinking, or of that poor foolish Mrs. Bernadine, it is their future—Julian's future, Leila's future. Mother, have you never guessed his secret? he has loved Leila since the first day he met her, and she, if she does not love him absolutely, has grown to know him, to care for him as she has never cared for another living soul!"

Mrs. Sylvester bent her head.

"Yes, I have guessed something of this, Margot, and I have rejoiced over it, for they are both dear to me. I think I know all that is passing in your mind. You see trouble looming up in front of them, and you are right. There will be trouble, great trouble for Leila more than for Julian. When has Eustace Vane ever done anything but bring trouble to everyone with whom he has come in contact? Here we are at the hotel, and I am glad to have arrived with no broken bones. I will have a cup of tea in your room, Margot."

It was not long before tea was brought and served in the big bay window that commanded a full view of the sea.

"Leila has gone for a sail with Julian, I insisted upon it. Mother, she has been working like a slave again this last week. I feel convinced she has some other claim of her father's to meet that we know nothing of."

"Well," said Mrs. Sylvester, dryly, as Margot poured her out a second cup of tea; "well, if Julian is not quickly to the fore, I fancy Leila's father will have provided himself with an income sufficient to settle any amount of claims. Margot, it seems incredible, doesn't it, that that middle-aged rascal should have such power as to twist a woman as bright and clever as Mrs. Bernadine is round his finger as easily as he is now doing. Of course," Mrs. Sylvester summed up briskly, "of course he got that money out of her with which to pay me back that debt, and he has been particularly happy in having turned her mind against me at the same time; her manner has been most markedly different since you went away."

Margot sat silent, looking across the sea. It was all so pitiful, so repugnant to her to realise, knowing as she did by such bitter experience the cruelty, the utter worthlessness of the man who, though he was by courtesy called Leila's father, had been the strongest, the most definite enemy she had ever known. How would it all end? she asked herself, sadly.

"Mother," she said passionately, when she broke her silence at last, "mother, we must do all we can to keep Leila's happiness. I have felt only too well that Julian's courtship must run roughly, for Leila is not as other girls, and her heart is so sore with the remembrance of all her father's wrong; but I have hoped also that

Julian would be stronger than she, that his love and its power would overpower her pride and her determined self-sacrifice; but this new situation makes the future far more difficult than it ever could have been before. You see that, mother dear?"

Mrs. Sylvester nodded her head in assent.

"I am going to have a quiet talk with Julian," she said. "To confess the whole truth to you, Margot, this is the real reason of my visit here. At Wilton Crobie I had no chance even when he was there, and you know he has only been there nominally lately; his whole attention has been given up to Giles Bernadine. Besides, it is needless to say," Mrs. Sylvester added, with a burst of contempt and wrath; "it is needless to say, that that scoundrel has been very careful not to let the faintest idea of the circumstances reach Julian until he had made them pretty sure for himself. I shall have a quiet talk with Julian this very afternoon. I shall send him back to Wilton Crobie as fast as he can go. I am not at all easy in my mind that he is not there now!"

"And Leila, mother!"

"Leila must know nothing unless we are absolutely obliged to tell her. Poor child! what a cruel destiny seems to hang about her!"

"They will be back very soon, I hope," Margot said.

She rose and went to the window, looking steadily out over the sea.

"I don't see the boat any more. They have drifted out of sight. But Julian promised not to keep her out too late."

She stood there gazing for a long time, and then she turned.

"I think I will go and see how Mr. Bernadine is, mother. Perhaps he would like some tea?"

"Bring him here, Margot. I want to know him better. It seems to me as though he were made of the stuff I like!"

The rest of the afternoon was spent very quietly and pleasantly. It was drawing near to dinner time when Margot's eyes caught sight of two figures walking slowly up from the beach.

She ran out to meet them.

"Have you discovered a new world? You have been gone such a long time!" she cried, and then her gay words died on her lips, for a glance at their two faces told her that they had indeed discovered a new world, and knowing now the added difficulties that stretched before them, Margot had a touch of pity in her eyes and heart as she read their love secret so plainly.

CHAPTER XXII.

LEILA shared Margot's feelings of pleasure at sight of Mrs. Sylvester.

She had a sense of reliance and of comfort in the presence of this strong, kind woman.

It was so late when they returned from their boating expedition, that all idea of Julian departing for Wilton Crobie being delayed, Mrs. Sylvester determined to postpone her chat with him until after dinner.

"They shall have one happy hour at least whatever else comes," she said to herself. She carried Leila into her own room.

"You have something to tell me, my child, have you not?" she said in her tenderest fashion as they were alone.

Leila clung to her.

Mrs. Sylvester had almost a difficulty in recognizing the Leila she had known in this excited, brilliantly lovely young creature, with wide violet eyes and crimson cheeks.

"Oh! I am so happy—so happy," the girl said, passionately, "and yet I am so miserable too. I have no right to this happiness. You know I have no right to such happiness!"

"I know nothing of the sort—sit down Leila and be calm, my dear. Your hands are burning. You will be in a fever if you let yourself continue so excited as this. Sit down and grow perfectly calm. I shall not talk to you for another ten minutes—then I shall turn round and find my dear, calm, sensible Leila once again."

Leila shuddered.

"No," she said, and her voice fell to a whisper. "No, I do not want to be myself again. I do not want to grow calm—to be sensible to reason—for then," she threw out her hands, "then there will not even be a phantom of happiness. All will go, all will be lost to me for ever."

Mrs. Sylvester passed her hand over the girl's soft hair.

"Julian Bernardino has told you he loves you!" she said; she saw now it was better to talk than to encourage silence.

Leila looked up at her.

"He loves me," she said with all the pathos of a child mingled with incredulity.

"And you love him!"

The girl's face flushed a deeper rose and then grew pale.

"Oh! I love him! I love him!" she said, her voice was a revelation of beauty.

Mrs. Sylvester stooped and kissed her.

"Heaven bless you both," she said with great tenderness. "I can never let you know how glad this makes me, how I rejoice at your news, Leila. Pray Heaven your life henceforth will know no trace of that misery and sadness that has darkened your girlhood and even your childhood before that!"

Leila drew back a little.

"You—you speak as if it were possible that I could be Julian's wife," she said, in a low, nervous way.

"Possible! of course I do! What are you saying, Leila! Is it true you love this man? If so, how can you imagine a future apart from him. It is not of yourself you have to think now but of the man you love—the man who loves you!"

"But," the word died away into silence. Leila sat with her head bent for a moment.

"Have you forgotten the shame, the dishonour, the wrong that belongs to me!" she asked, bitterly.

Mrs. Sylvester laughed.

"Now you are inventing, Leila," she cried. "Shame! dishonour! wrong! What wrong have you ever done? When have you been dishonoured? What shame lies upon your head? Pooh! my dear, we live in a material world and a matter-of-fact century, fortunately. Your father has been a bad man from the beginning of all time. He will continue being a bad man until it pleases a beneficent Providence to remove him from our midst. Are you going to let your father's wrong-doing bring the greatest suffering possible to the heart of the man you love? If such a thought has framed itself in your mind, you certainly are not the girl I have taken you for!"

Leila started from these sharp words as if they had been a lash.

"I want to do my duty," she said, eagerly. "I must do what is right, no matter what it costs me."

"And you consider you would be doing what is right by breaking Julian's heart!"

Mrs. Sylvester's tone was good humouredly sarcastic, and Leila winced again.

"Set yourself in my place! Remember all that has gone. Think of Julian's position—of his social rank. Do you still consider I should be doing my duty to him to marry him, knowing as I do so well, what a heritage of dishonour I bring him!"

"My dear, once and for all, understand your father's dishonour is not yours. You are a brave, upright, noble hearted girl who has borne with a life that few men could have endured, with a courage that has been something phenomenal. I consider you are a wife any man should be proud to own, and I shall make it my business to see that Julian obtains you for his wife with as little delay as possible!"

Leila found herself laughing and blushing at such strong words of praise.

"But, oh! you are so good, so helpful! nothing seems so hard when you take it in hand."

"I am practical," Mrs. Sylvester said, in her heartiest fashion; "but I have a little love for romance all the same. You would not think it

to look at me, but such is the case, nevertheless. Now, you must go and make yourself beautiful for the evening. Let me look at you Leila. Why, you have grown years younger. You have just the same air as you had when you were a little wee thing sitting on your poor mother's knee. Ah! love is a great, a wonderful thing. Now kiss me and give me your hands. I want you to make me a promise. I have never asked you a favour before; you will not refuse me now, I know."

Leila looked at her earnestly.

"If it is a promise I can make. You know it is given before you ask for it, dear, dear friend!"

"It is a promise you not only can, but you must make. Put your hands in mine and repeat these words after me. Don't look so frightened you poor little thing! do you not know I have your deepest interest at heart? Come, that is better, I like you when you smile. Now for your promise. I shall say it very slowly. 'I promise you that I will bring no trouble willingly upon the man I love, and that I will therefore become Julian Bernardino's wife, whenever he shall desire me to do so.'"

Leila hesitated, her face flushed and paled, her hands trembled like two frail leaves in Mrs. Sylvester's hold. The girl's spirit passed through a multitude of feelings in this moment of silence, of hesitation; but slowly the struggle ceased. She had a sensation of rest, of warmth, of joy that was not to be for an hour only, but for all her life.

Must she shut herself away from such warmth, such joy—she who had known nothing but cold and bitter pain!

And he! that brave noble lover who had knelt at her feet out beyond, with the music of the sea mingling in with his deep earnest vows. Must she return his love with sorrow; must she push him from her; must she live on her life utterly alone, knowing that the light of another life was darkened by their separation?

She grew very cold, and her hands were like ice; then she looked upwards.

"I will give you my promise," she said, bravely, and without faltering she repeated the words after Mrs. Sylvester.

She was vowed now to become Julian Bernardino's wife.

Mrs. Sylvester's information, given to Julian late that night, when the rest of the party were gone to rest, fell upon him like a thunderbolt.

"My mother! Eustace Vane! My mother do this rash—this terrible thing! Oh, dear friend, what story is this you are telling me!"

"A true one, Julian, I fear," Mrs. Sylvester said, sadly.

They were sitting in the bay window, where tea had been served that afternoon, and the moon was riding magnificently in the heavens, having turned the world to silver—the sea to a floating majesty of diamonds.

The young man felt as though a blight had fallen upon his wonderful happiness—as though a veil were stretched over the beauty of the night—he was plunged into confused and troubled thought.

He seemed to have gone back to those old, old days when his one idea had been to save his mother from harm, to shield and protect her—give her comfort and peace. All this he had done—he had worked for her night and day—no Jacob serving for his Rachel had been more faithful, more earnest, more hard working, than this son had been for his mother. And he had done so much for her—he had lived to see her grow back into the youth that had been blighted so cruelly—he had watched her beauty expand as some wonderful flower brought from the chill night air into a warm, fragrant home.

This news was most terrible to him; it revealed once again that lamentable weakness and lack of character which had been, perhaps, one of the biggest causes of her early misery. He had very quickly realised Eustace Vane at his true worth.

It had been against himself to judge any man harshly, but he had been forced to read the

shifty dishonesty of the nature hidden beneath a distinguished bearing and a specious manner.

It was Leila's father he had found himself dismissing with such contempt, but Julian was not one for half measures. He knew enough of Leila's nature to gather the world of difference there was between her father and herself; and he had the vague hints Margot and her mother had dropped from time to time to strengthen his bad opinion of Eustace Vane.

And for such a creature—for so vile a man—his mother, his beautiful mother, could so far forget her matronly dignity as to permit herself to drift into an intercourse that would have disgraced a school-girl!

"Oh! it hurts me—it hurts me!" Julian said, suddenly. "She has been so dear to me—she has been my constant care, my child almost. I cannot realise such a thing. I must go to her at once."

"I second this resolution," Mrs. Sylvester said. "Go to-morrow early. I know enough of your mother to see that you have very great power with her, and as for him—"

Julian clenched his hands.

"I would gladly thrash him, old man as he is," he said, fiercely. "When I remember all he has cost that child—these things you have told me to-night, dear friend, are eating into my heart—when I realise his cruelty to Leila, I could almost kill him! and for this added wrong, this miserable business— He broke off and then he laughed. "One thing is very sure; there will be no further fear of Mr. Vane when he knows my mother's true financial position."

"Ah!" Mrs. Sylvester uttered the word as an exclamation, "she has no large fortune then, Julian!"

"She has nothing, absolutely nothing except what I choose to give her," Julian answered, quietly. "The money you imagine she must have given him, must have been the quarter's instalment of her allowance, which I paid into her bank a week or so ago. I have never permitted her to have any money dealings. She does not understand the rudiments of money spending or saving."

"Then your path is clear!" Mrs. Sylvester cried triumphantly. "Eustace Vane has no doubt imagined she possesses a large private fortune. This difficulty, once explained, he will vanish out of sight immediately; and, thank Heaven," Margot's mother said, warmly, "thank Heaven, it is you who are going to be Leila's husband; for you will take care he does not come near her or try to molest her, once she is married!"

"If he dares to approach her I will have him whipped away like the dog that he is."

Never had Julian Bernardino's anger been so roused as now; he was quivering with rage against Vane, and he was conscious of a sense of bitter disappointment against his mother.

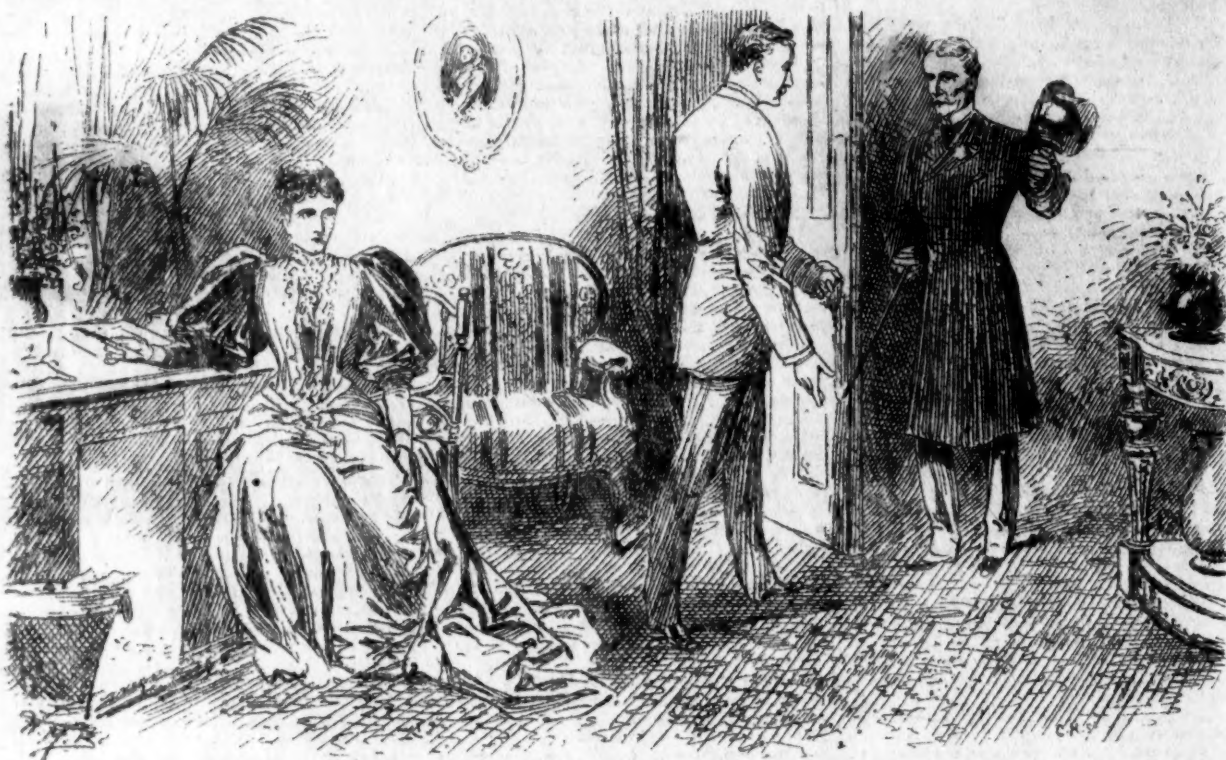
Her conduct was ungrateful, even cruel, when all things were considered. He had given her all the years of his young life, and she could turn from him so coldly, so easily, and dream of making a new future for herself the first time a plausible second came into her path.

"I shall go before breakfast. I will not even wait to see Leila before I go. You will not let her think I have neglected her, I know. I will write her to-night before I go to bed; but I must say nothing to let her even imagine what is happening. It would be sufficient to drive her from me for ever!" and Julian grew a shade paler at the thought.

Mrs. Sylvester kissed him as he said, "Good night!"

"You may rest comforted," she told him, "Leila will be in my care now till she goes to you; and as she has given me a solid promise—a vow indeed—that she will become your wife whenever you desire it, I think you need have no fears or qualms for your future happiness with her. I am deeply sorry about this other business, Julian, and I grieve that it was my hand that should have been the first to throw a cloud on your new happiness; but you will forgive me I hope. You will know I acted for the best."

"As you always do," Julian exclaimed; and with one more hand clasp they parted.



"YOU COME MOST OPPORTUNELY, MR. VANE," JULIAN SAID COLDLY, YET COURTEOUSLY.

Mrs. Bernadine was sitting alone in her boudoir the next day when her son made his appearance.

Julian's eyes took in the details of her toilette. He had a sudden rush of horror as he saw that there was an unnatural bloom upon his mother's face, and that her gown was a degree more youthful even than it generally was.

She greeted him with a smile; but he saw that she was surprised at seeing him, almost he feared, displeased.

"You are back sooner than you expected, are you not?" she asked, half carelessly.

She was sitting at her writing-table; there were papers scattered about, and open pass-books, and some old cheques.

Julian noticed with another pang that his mother pushed the pass-book and cheques out of sight as he drew near to her.

He stooped to kiss her, and she offered her cheek.

"I have been obliged to return on business, mother," he said. He tried to keep any sternness out of his voice; but his agitation was great, and in his desire to repress that he made his voice very hard, very cold.

Mrs. Bernadine looked up at him in startled fashion.

"Business!" she repeated. "What sort of business, Julian—is there anything wrong about the estate?"

He shook his head.

"I hope not," he answered, and then he was silent again. Suddenly a thought struck him, he would ask for proof of what Mrs. Sylvester had told him; so far he had had nothing but her surmise on which to found his fears.

"I am troubled about a personal matter," he said as calmly as he could. "I have need of rather a large sum of ready money, and I have come to ask you, mother, if you will kindly oblige me with three or four hundred just for a few days! I know you have this in hand, as I paid your quarter's allowance into the bank barely a fortnight ago."

Mrs. Bernadine turned very pale. If her son

had wanted confirmation of his imagination about her artificial complexion, the confirmation was before him now—her rouge stood out inconspicuously on her pallid cheeks. She could not speak at first, when she did her voice was shrill and harsh.

"What can you want so much money for, Julian! What is your trouble? What is wrong?"

Julian looked at her for a long moment in silence.

"Alas!" he said, breaking that silence at last. "Alas! mother dear, I think it is I who must put that question to you. What have you done with this money?"

Mrs. Bernadine flushed now, her soft pretty face had a hard, mulish look.

"My dear Julian, are you my jailor—must I give you an account of every farthing I spend? Am I not old enough to take care of myself and attend to my own business?"

"If you have this money at your disposal will you lend it to me, mother?" Julian asked, answering all her questions in the most pertinent way.

Mrs. Bernadine rose from her chair slowly.

"I am sorry I am unable to do what you ask,"

she said, very coldly.

Julian paused.

"Then you have not got the money?"

She bent her head.

"I have not got the money," she replied, still coldly. "I have paid it all away."

Julian's anger flashed out.

"Aye, indeed, you have paid it all away, mother, to a source which is discreditable in every sense of the word!"

Mrs. Bernadine drew back from him.

"Julian!" she said in amazement and fear.

Julian held out his hand.

"Mother, if I wrong you, I pray you to forgive me, but I am deeply troubled, deeply hurt; very unhappy."

"In what way does all this concern me—and my money?" Mrs. Bernadine asked coldly, her

manner was absolutely hard, utterly devoid of all sympathy.

Her son looked at her with sorrow in his eyes, and at that moment there came a knock at the door. Seeing his mother's face change, Julian divined who it was that stood without.

He moved quickly to the door and opened it.

"You come most opportunely, Mr. Vane," he said coldly, yet courteously; "will you enter, please. I have something to say to you of great importance."

(To be continued.)

THE monkey's intelligence has never been able to arrive at a point which enables that animal to achieve the untying of a knot. You may tie a monkey with a cord fastened with the simplest form of common knot, and unless the beast can break the string or gnaw it in two, he will never get loose. To untie the knot requires observation and reasoning power, and though a monkey may possess both, he has neither in a sufficient degree to enable him to overcome the difficulty.

TYROLEAN maidens are by old custom spared the necessity of giving tongue to their "Ay" or "No." The first time a young man pays a visit as an avowed suitor, he brings with him a bottle of wine, of which he pours out a glass, and offers it to the object of his affections. In any case she will not refuse it point blank—that would be too gross an insult—but should the wooer not be agreeable to her, or his declaration come a little too prematurely, she declines the proffered wine, pleading that it looks sour, or that wine disagrees with her, or any other excuse that feminine ingenuity may suggest. If she likes the lad, and is equal to owning it, she empties the glass, taking care not to spill any of the wine, for if she does so, or the glass or bottle be broken, it is an unhappy omen. "They have spilt the wine between them," say the peasants when the marriage turns out badly.



"ONLY THE OTHER DAY YOLANDE AND I CALLED AT FOYDALE CASTLE," SAID MRS. KILDARE.

DR. DURHAM'S DAUGHTER.

—102—

CHAPTER XIX.

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF LADY ANNE GUEST.

SAME DATE.—"And then, Lady Anne," young Lyulph went on, gently, "when you came up to me, and I found myself at last, face to face with one that bore the name of Guest, a Guest of Beaumanoir, the old fierce dislike and antagonism awoke swiftly and suddenly within me, and I burned to tell you outright, before all those people around us there, how thoroughly I hated that ancient name of yours, and wherefore it was that I did so."

"The Doctor said afterwards I had managed very badly, not to say reprehensibly—but of course I was quite aware of that. I could not help myself at the moment—I could not! though I was penitent enough, believe me, Lady Anne, when it was all too late to act differently, and the opportunity was gone."

He has not yet learnt to call me "Aunt Anne," and I respect him for the reticence, the hesitation.

It will come in time quite naturally, I have no doubt, when he knows me better, and feels more at home with us.

I mistrust always anything approaching "gush," and overtures too friendly on a brief acquaintance.

His father he still calls "Sir."

"I do believe you, Edenbridge," I answered, gravely. "But that—is it not—is all over and done with now?"

"You mean, Lady Anne—"

"I mean, my dear lad, that old fierce feeling of antagonism and enmity you were speaking of just now?"

He laid his hand then gently but firmly upon mine.

"Yes indeed," he replied, with an earnestness

of tone and mien which carried conviction on the face of it; "and now let us, dear Lady Anne, mention it never again."

Early to-morrow morning, Raoul wishes him to make the acquaintance of Malcolm, the steward, who, indeed, is most eager to take his pupil in hand.

Lyulph himself laughs heartily, and says that he fears he shall cut but a sorry figure as a farmer.

Nevertheless, I know right well that whatever his hand shall find to do, will be done with all his might; because the will within him is strong and pure, and his heart God-fearing and true.

I have just risen from my knees by the bedside; my eyes—I hardly know why, for I am very happy—are hot and moist with tears.

I have been asking a blessing upon our brave lad's future, praying earnestly for his contentment and welfare in the new estate unto which he has been called—that he may never more have reason to regret that he bears his father's name.

Oh, that my supplications may be granted to the full, then his earthly lot in truth will be a glad and bright one!

I bow my head once more upon my clasped hands, and pray again that his Heavenly Father may bless and guide his footsteps always!

(End of Extracts from the Journal of Lady Anne Guest.)

CHAPTER XX.

CHRISTMAS was approaching—the hard, white, nipping English frosts were coming on as well; each passing day seemed to leave the face of the world chillier, harder, more lifeless.

And it seemed, too, well-nigh impossible that

green whispering trees and perfumed flowers could ever again burst forth in all their old familiar freshness and welcome loveliness from a Mother Earth who, apparently, had forgotten how to smile, and whose heart had ceased to beat in a frozen bosom.

But winter is like death, and spring is like life one knows; only that nature dies not in reality—merely goes to sleep; and, as Victor Hugo has told us in one of his exquisite poems:

"*Dieu est toujours là.*"

Some such reflections as these were passing vaguely through the mind of Margery Durham, as she stood one morning at the breakfast room window, looking out upon the hard white road with idle, unseeing eyes.

Her father had just driven off on his daily round of calls; and his daughter Margery as usual had been watching the starting of the gig.

The sober routine of their old-fashioned household remained the same as ever—not one whit was it changed in any particular, though changes indeed had been going on around them.

The clockwork-like regularity of such simple lives as theirs was not easily put out of order—the wholesome tyranny of every day customs is a yoke not easily shaken off.

Yet it seemed to Margery now, somehow, that her life was one endless round of unrelieved monotony, with one day the exact counterpart of the day before, the present week the exact counterpart of its predecessor.

Those once pleasant and all-sufficing domestic duties of hers had somehow, too, lost their charm and attraction—the novelty of it all had departed.

There were hours indeed when she felt almost inclined to write a persuasive and submissive epistle to her Aunt Susan Patchett, begging her to return from her sojourn at Bristol, where that boxom matron was still unwillingly lingering by the bedside of her ailing relative.

Aunt Susan had gone for a week or so only;

but her absence had now extended over a space of months.

Foxdale and its surrounding neighbourhood had by this time ceased to talk about "Mr. Lylph Lynne"—the nine days' wonder had lived itself out, as such things ever do.

He was Lylph, Viscount Edenbridge now, and was spoken of by everyone as the Earl of Beaumanoir's son.

Years, sometimes, instead of weeks merely, to the dull and aching heart of Margery Durham, seemed to have crept insidiously away since those ever-to-be-remembered days when he had dwelt with them in her father's house.

Every ray of hope and sunshine had died out utterly for Margery in that hour when he exchanged their roof-tree for the shelter of the great house on the hill, which for the future thenceforward would be his rightful home.

Yes, he was Lord Edenbridge now. "And he will be the Earl of Beaumanoir some day," she heard, also, constantly on every side.

The parting between them, when the moment for it came, had been very quiet, very undemonstrative—why indeed should it be otherwise? Yet poor Margery felt, in her exceeding heaviness of spirit, that she knelt for the dead should have been tolling them as they spoke that good-bye to each other!

She had seen him frequently since, it was true, driving through Foxdale on fine afternoons in the Castle carriage with the Earl his father, and his aunt, Lady Anne, or perchance riding past with Mr. Malcolm, the steward, on some errand in connection with the improvement of farm buildings.

But never once had there occurred, as yet, an opportunity of their exchanging a word.

Oh, the heavy, the hideous monotony of those dim gray winter days!

All day long young Edenbridge was very busy, the doctor used to come home and tell Margery, and his evenings were devoted entirely to the Earl, who, in fact, was miserable when his son was out of his sight.

Ah! used Margery to think, how she envied her own dear father that daily visit of his to the sick Earl at Foxdale Castle!

"She only said, 'My life is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am a weary, a weary,
I would that I were dead!'"

So Margery Durham repeated to herself one day, and laughed joylessly enough to think how similar her own lot was unto that of the lonely woman in the Moated Grange; only—only she did not really want to die like the hapless Mariana; she was not yet quite so crasy as that.

Yet when—oh, when would she again feel the clasp of that firm strong hand, she wondered heavily, and hear once more the pleasant tones of that voice which was so unspeakably dear to her!

Who could tell?

Perhaps, indeed, nevermore!

It had always been wrong and foolish, of course, to allow her secret thoughts to dwell upon him so constantly—on him who cared not a straw for her. Therefore, how much more foolish and blameworthy was it now, at a time when things had become so changed!

To her desolate fancy there was now an insuperable barrier, an impassable gulf, set sternly between them—him and her—which at any rate had not existed before.

He was the acknowledged heir and future lord of Foxdale Castle—she was Margery Durham, simply Margery Durham, the village surgeon's daughter.

Yes, indeed, there had sprung up a difference between them, vast and well-defined—assuredly it was not necessary to remind Margery ever of that! Bitter consciousness of the truth was never absent from her.

It was only, however, when she was quite alone that she permitted her wretched spirits to get the upper hand, as it were.

In the evening, in the company of her father, she managed to rouse herself somehow, to manifest an interest in his kindly, genial gossip, and even to laugh and talk gaily herself sometimes.

And so Dr. Durham never once suspected that the poor child's life had gone all awry!

Since Viscount Edenbridge's departure from their house, the doctor had engaged no other assistant to live with him permanently as a member of the domestic circle, nor did he intend to do so.

"Mr. Lynne," said he, "had quite spoilt him for anyone else;" and Margery, it need scarcely be recorded, rejoiced greatly at her father's decision.

It showed his wisdom, she told him lightly; for another Mr. Dibbs—whom she still remembered with a shudder—after Lord Beaumanoir's son, would have been an infliction wholly insupportable.

So Mr. Finch, a clever and much respected practitioner from Slingford—who, notwithstanding his talents, could find but little to do on his own account in the town—Slingford being overcrowded in the matter of doctors, some of them physicians of renown—came thrice a week over to Foxdale in order to assist Dr. Durham; and on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Mr. Finch was to be found there in the dingy narrow surgery.

Often, of course, at dinner together—the subject was inevitable—the doctor and his daughter spoke of Viscount Edenbridge, and of the new life which now engrossed him at the stately old mansion on the hill.

"Daddy dear, it was really too bad of you," said Margery on one occasion, forcing herself to be cheerful in her father's presence as usual, "to keep me all in the dark as you did, whilst you yourself knew quite well the whole time who Mr. Lynne actually was, and the reason of his being here in Foxdale. I do not think that I shall ever forgive you absolutely for the deceptive part you played throughout."

"But you see, my dear, it was his secret, and not mine," was the doctor's answer. "And besides, Margery, don't fib. You forget—you were not altogether in the dark, I fancy. Indeed your suspicions, I am pretty well sure, had been awakened—your woman's wit was at work. Why, have you forgotten what a corner you got me into one evening in the autumn, when you thought proper to visit me in the library, and settled yourself for business on the hearthrug at my feet? You catechised me rather shrewdly, and to the purpose, then, I remember."

"Ah, yes, I recollect," said Margery, still trying her best to smile as in the old happy time when there was nothing to conceal. "Nevertheless those suspicions of mine were of the very haziest description, daddy dear, and I could not have expressed them clearly to you if I had tried."

And so those leaden winter days wore on.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was a bleak gray afternoon in the second week of December, and Margery Durham was sitting at work in the great parlour at home, all by herself as usual.

Within doors it was all warm and pleasant and cheerful enough, the big wood fire which Molly had kindled was burning and crackling frostily on the gleaming andirons.

Presently Margery heard a knock at the hall door. Who could it be!

Her heart beat fast. Was it—was it Lady Anne? Lady Anne Guest had not been into Foxdale to visit her young favourite for a long while now; so possibly it was she after all.

It could not be the Rev. Timothy Price, decided Margery; for only that very morning at luncheon-time, he had looked in to know when Aunt Susan Patchett might be expected home from Bristol.

Divers Christmas charities were awaiting her attention and supervision.

Soon Sally threw open the door of the great parlour: "Mrs. Kildare," announced she.

And Mrs. Kildare entered accordingly, enveloped daintily from head to foot in costly velvet and fur.

Margery Durham tried not to show the dis-

appointment she felt; though she succeeded but ill, she knew.

"You are indeed a stranger," said the girl, as cordially as she could.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Kildare, in that smooth, suave manner of hers, and with the well-known juvenile smile, as she sank down restfully and gracefully near the fireside upon the softest and deepest seat she could see in her vicinity; "yes, it is in truth an age since we last saw anything of each other, Margery dear, I know. But it has been so horribly cold and slippery lately that neither Yolande nor I have cared to venture abroad. I wanted her to accompany me here this afternoon; but of course she refused—you know Yolande," sighed Yolande's mother lackadaisically.

Margery had seen scarcely anything of Yolande Kildare since the performance of her latest caprice—the heartless throwing-over of Sir George Stoke.

The affair had shocked Margery Durham, had troubled her, in fact, sorely at the time; and she privately, now, mistrusted Yolande more thoroughly perhaps than she had ever done before.

What new mischief was she conceiving and planning, having alienated effectually Sir George Stoke's importunities?

But Mrs. Kildare was prattling on.

"However, it is not wise dear, you know," she continued, amiably, "to sit in doors too much. Exercise is so necessary for us all—exercise of some sort; and really, once out in the cold air, walking is delightful this hard wintry weather. After all, *ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte, vous savez, chérie*. At all events, I find it so. Now will you put on your things and come back with me and dine with us at the Grange House! A brisk walk will put a little colour into your cheeks—for a wonder, you are looking pale, Margery!"

"It is very kind of you, Mrs. Kildare, to make the suggestion," Margery replied, with a touch of impatience that was almost petulance; "but you seem to forget that there is my father to be thought of."

Mrs. Kildare laughed lightly, and adroitly placed a substantial sampler screen between her fair veiled face and the fire. To-day, despite the frosty weather, it wore the peach-bloom of "sweet seventeen."

"Oh no," cried she, "I am not forgetting dear Dr. Durham, nor his dutiful daughter either; or I should not be here now, Margery! But, seriously, darling, one can hardly marvel at your liking to remain indoors with this charming, home-like, sweet-scented big old parlour in which to shut yourself up from everyone. You should wear a sack and flowered satin petticoat, and a huge mob-cap, child, when you sit here at work, with a patch on your nose—I mean your cheek—and another on your chin, and powder your hair, and tie it with a black ribbon, and then the delightful old picture would be complete! Do you get Mr. Price to burn incense about the place, or in what, pray, lies the secret of this sweet and subtle odour? If you can truthfully assure me that it is nothing in the world but *pot-pourri*, I must really entreat you to give me the recipe."

And so sitting from one subject to another in that half-bantering, half-affected fashion that Mrs. Kildare indulged in occasionally, and characteristically, the lady got round at last to the Earl of Beaumanoir and his son Lord Edenbridge.

"Only the other day," said she, "we—Yolande and I—called at Foxdale Castle—"

"I thought," put in Margery quietly, "I thought, Mrs. Kildare, that neither yourself nor Yolande had been out anywhere lately! You said so, I am certain, a few minutes ago."

"Did I, dear?" said Yolande's mother, with a pretty little air of perplexed innocence, and not one whit abashed. "Then I suppose, after all, it must have been some time back when we called at the Castle—I have such a wretched memory, you see! Anyhow, I was merely going to observe that that good-for-nothing old Lord Beaumanoir verily appears to have taken a fresh lease of life. The extraordinary finding of the

long-lost heir has made him ten years younger! He talks now of nothing but 'my son.'

"And that stiff old Lady Anne, too, is positively growing into another sort of person altogether! Her affability and kittenish ways absolutely took our very breath away, I do assure you! Have you been there lately yourself, dear Margery?"

Margery shook her head only for reply.

Good gracious! Puritan-like Lady Anne described as kittenish by the volatile Mrs. Kildare!

What would her honest father have said, Margery wondered, to such false, flippant talk—he who was in Lady Anne's society every day of his life?

"No! Ah, but you will be going there soon, I have no doubt. Really, dear Margery," continued Mrs. Kildare, in her dulcet, cooing tones, "you ought to go at once, and lose no time, the Castle ménage now, in its novel circumstances and surroundings, is an interesting study and a revelation, to say no more. And the freshness of it all will soon wear away, you know, so take my advice and call at the first opportunity."

"By the way, whenever I come across young Lord Edenbridge himself,—and he is constantly passing the Grange House, either riding or walking—how difficult it is to realise that he is no longer 'Mr. Lynne!'

"After all, the whole story was too wonderful, was it not? It will take us all some time, I fancy, to get over the surprise! He was always a handsome young man—singularly so, indeed—but I really think now that he is positively handsomer than ever. He used to look so—so sulky always when he lived here with you in Foxdale!"

"Sulky, Mrs. Kildare!" exclaimed Margery quickly, on the defensive, as it were, in a moment.

"Well, *cherie*, not exactly sulky, perhaps; but moody, or dissatisfied, or grumpy, shall we say!—that is nearer the truth. However, all that now seems to have disappeared, and his face has become bright and *debonnairement*, and, of course, those striking good looks of his gain in consequence."

"I was always fond of him," declared Mrs. Kildare, glibly, "even when we first knew him in Germany, in the spring. I always guessed then that he was somebody, and a gentleman born, and not of the *tiers état*. Yes, do you know, dear Margery," she repeated softly, her powdered eyelids drooping, her hands folded Madonna-like in her lap, "Lord Edenbridge was always a favourite of mine."

Margery Durham felt simply dumfounded at her visitor's effrontery, knowing all that she did!

The smiling self-confidence of Mrs. Kildare seemed to bewilder her somehow—almost to take her breath away.

What a pair they were, the girl was thinking bitterly, the mother and the daughter!

Which of the two was the false, which the more dangerous and subtle to contend with?

Either, indeed, would be most undesirable as an enemy, thought Margery Durham, insensibly.

At length she was beginning to discern the drift of Mrs. Kildare's innuendoes, it had dawned at last upon the understanding of Margery!

Lynph Lynne, the Heidelberg student, the unknown assistant in Dr. Durham's surgery, was a person of course to be despised, overlooked, and slighted absolutely.

Lynph, Viscount Edenbridge, the only son of the Earl of Beaumanoir, the bearer of an ancient name and the future lord of Foxdale Castle, was naturally a personage of totally different mould, who must be cultivated assiduously and made much of accordingly.

Self-willed Yolande, having dismissed Sir George Stoke, might possibly now win back her former lover to his old allegiance, were she only to set herself to try, now that he was so much worth the winning.

True, Sir George and Revelstoke were lost irretrievably—but then Lynph, Viscount Edenbridge, backed by Foxdale Castle, was a far more splendid parti in the county, in truth a great catch for Yolande!

Besides, had not Yolande herself been rather "hard hit" in that quarter! For it was not exactly she who had thrown over the Heidelberg student in those old days abroad, as Mrs. Kildare

doubtless remembered; there was another way, distinctly another way, of looking at that particular affair.

Moreover, Margery knew intuitively why her visitor sat there before her in their great parlour on that wintry afternoon.

She felt, now, as certain as though Mrs. Kildare had expounded her errand outright that she had come on purpose to gauge, to probe, as it were, her—Margery's—own heart in a certain direction concerning which, perhaps, she was more than just a little perplexed.

And inwardly Margery resented proudly the implied suspicion, the delicate yet obvious manoeuvring of Mrs. Kildare. Outwardly she was on her guard.

"Yes," agreed the girl, drily, in answer to that last amazing statement, "Lord Edenbridge was always a favourite of yours, Mrs. Kildare, we know."

"And you see, Margery darling," she went on as sweetly as ever, her smiling eyes through the tinted veil kept watchfully on the face of Margery Durham, "he and Yolande were always such good friends that—that I do not mind telling you if you will promise me faithfully it shall not be repeated, that I should not in the least wonder if they were eventually to make up the stupid little difference which somehow arose between them at Heidelberg—a mere lovers' quarrel, dear child, such as you at present would scarcely understand—and drift back gradually, insensibly, into their old relations towards each other."

"What more likely, dear, or natural, pray, in the circumstances!"

"At the Castle the other day, when we called there, things certainly looked suggestive—not to say promising. I may say, indeed, without exaggeration, that he paid her the most marked attention the whole time."

"Yolande, as you are aware, Margery, is very capricious and uncertain; still I do not think now that one need look far afield to discover the right explanation for that last freak of hers with Sir George Stoke."

"She was simply amusing herself *pour passer le temps*—her real heart, poor darling, was elsewhere."

"Now, Margery pet, mind, not a syllable of all this to any living soul—if you love me, breathe not a word of it! It has been imparted to you, remember, in strictest confidence, and you must regard it as a great secret for the present—*entre nous*, you know, entirely *entre nous*!"

It cost Margery much to remain so apparently indifferent and unmoved; but not once had she flinched or quailed under the level, cruel gaze of those alert, conscienceless eyes.

Not if she could in any wise help it, should Mrs. Kildare depart with a sense of victory, and her suspicions—whatever they might be—confirmed.

"Strictly *entre nous*, dearest Margery; do not forget," reiterated the lady from the Grange House, with her friendliest smile and a significant little nod, which was meant to convey volumes.

And then she rose to go.

When Mrs. Kildare was really gone, and Margery Durham found herself once more alone, she sat herself down with a weary gesture upon the *broth-rug* in the firelight, and buried her face in the pillows of a big sofa near.

"They will get him back," she moaned helplessly. "They will get him back between them! They are so treacherous, so crafty, so clever, so unprincipled. In time they will succeed in getting him back; and then . . . and then . . ."

The frosty December twilight was closing in apace, with cold black shadows and wintry mists.

The fire was sinking low; the great room was growing very dim and chilly.

Yet Margery did not stir—she could not. Despair had taken possession of and paralysed her very soul—the iron had entered into it with a vengeance—the fountain of life seemed frozen within her . . .

Verily, it was winter everywhere for Margery in that hour—an hour that she never forgot!

"News—great news for you, Margery!" cried

her father, cheerily, as soon as he arrived home from his day's work in the country, one bleak dark night about a week later on. "Now guess what it is, my dear—come guess!"

"Oh, I cannot, my dear old man—I cannot indeed!" replied Margery, with an involuntary sigh. "Why, I never even guessed a riddle in my life!"

"Well, never mind. This isn't a riddle. Come, try," said Dr. Durham, in high good spirits. And Margery perforce tried accordingly.

"Old Peter Peck, at Revelstoke, has beaten his poor wife to death at last!" she said at random—just the first idle thing that came into her head.

"No."

"Miss Olivia Johnson is going to be married, perhaps!"

"No."

"They are going to do away with the poor old coach, and bring the railroad into Foxdale!"

"No."

"Then," said Margery, with a sort of weary desperation, "Her Majesty is coming to the town of Slingford—to open an asylum for idiots!"

"No, Margery," replied her father, laughing, and dropping his hand heavily upon her shoulder as he spoke, "you are altogether wide of the mark. I must tell you."

And this was Dr. Durham's news—and wonderful news it would be counted too, the moment the gossips and busybodies should hear of it and the rumour become common property in Foxdale.

The Earl, it seemed—the Earl whose health of late had improved so greatly, the love for his boy, the new strange happiness of having him constantly in his sight, being the mainspring as it were of this extraordinary amendment—the Earl of Beaumanoir had at length decided, after long and serious consultation with his sister Lady Anne, upon killing the fatted calf at Foxdale Castle, in honour of his newly found son.

In plain words, Lord Beaumanoir had now determined to give a grand ball to all his friends and neighbours, from whose midst he had been absent for so many years. So that Lynph, Viscount Edenbridge, the handsome young heir, might be formally and proudly introduced to everyone of them, there at the Castle, at his father's side, in that lavish and splendid old-world style which our grandfathers and grandmothers so loved in their day.

After the Castle ball, there was talk of feasting the tenantry and their families, a treat for the Foxdale and Revelstoke school-children, with polkas and quadrilles and all kinds of fun for the servants and their friends in the servants' hall as a right and suitable *finale* to the general rejoicing.

On the whole, it seemed to Margery Durham, Foxdale was soon to have an exceedingly gay time of it.

"And when everything has been said," observed Dr. Durham, musingly, "it is but the proper thing to do in the circumstances, since Lord Beaumanoir appears to fancy himself equal to the excitement of it all."

"The neighbourhood, remembering the state of his health, has sensibly expected nothing of the kind from him heretofore; yet I cannot help thinking that, when the Earl's intention comes to be discussed parochially, everyone will be inclined to agree that the proceeding is no more than the occasion and situation demand. Can you picture it, Margery—a ball at Foxdale Castle!"

"That indeed I cannot, daddy!" said she, drawing a long, deep breath; her pulses beginning to throb in anticipation, the blood to thrill pleasurably in her veins—for after all Margery Durham was young. "The dear old place has been asleep, as one may say, for such an age, it will hardly know itself again when the time for its waking up comes. But the date, father dear! I want to hear! When is it all to be?"

"Upon my word and honour, I believe that I have clean forgotten it," answered the doctor, rubbing his forehead thoughtfully, and affecting not to notice his young daughter's impatience. "Let me see now—"

"Oh, make haste—make haste!" she cried

patting his shoulder. "You are purposely keeping me in suspense."

"Well, the date, then, my dear," laughed her father, genially, "is Tuesday, the 6th of January. They have arranged it, you see, for the beginning of the New Year. And Heaven grant," added Dr. Durham, with all due reverence now, "that the New Year may prove a happy one for Lord Beaumanoir's son."

And the wish found a solemn echo in Margery Durham's own heart.

"May Heaven bless and prosper Lylulph, Lord Edenbridge in the coming New Year!"

But how would it be with *herself*?

Ah, of that she dared not think!

And soon the formal invitations arrived at Dr. Durham's house—for the doctor himself, for Aunt Susan Patchett, and for Margery.

Everyone in the place, as a matter of course, was talking about this forthcoming ball at Foxdale Castle—wondering whether Mrs. Brown would be included in the long list of favoured ones, and the name of Mrs. Jones passed over; whether Mrs. Robinson would be thought "good enough," or whether she would not; and naturally, one and all, at the same time, expecting an invitation for themselves individually, no matter whether they received the same or were doomed to disappointment.

It was altogether such an unusual, such an exceptional affair, such a red-letter date as it were in one's calendar, that everybody for miles around the vicinity desired to be present on the eventful night.

For example, a certain Miss Smith was dying of mortification and wounded vanity because she had been bidden to the "servants' op"—as she called it—whilst her chosen friend, Miss Green, was actually going to the real, the grand house-ball, on the eventful 6th, the Revelstoke curate's wife having arranged to include Miss Green in her own "select party," and thus to smuggle this ambitious young person into a sphere where indeed she had no more business than had poor mortified Miss Smith herself.

You see, in a little world a little thing is sufficient to create a big disturbance.

Aunt Susan Patchett was returning to Foxdale on the day before—on the 5th, that is to say.

For her cousin Caroline thought that, after all, she might be able to last out for yet another year.

The brisk and bracing society of Aunt Susan, it would appear, had wrought in that ailing relative of hers a vast deal of good.

"You know, dear Margery," wrote Aunt Susan characteristically, "I would not miss the Castle ball on any account—it is so fortunate that poor dear Caroline will at last hear of my leaving her."

"I wish much, however, that I could get back to Foxdale for Christmas; but as Caroline positively refuses to listen to any suggestion of the kind, you and your good father must eat your turkey alone."

"I trust, dear Margery, that you and Betty are seeing properly to the mince-meat, and are making about the usual quantity."

"Don't scamp it, my dear, whatever you do—what is done well enough," remember, "is done quick enough."

Then in a postscript, Aunt Susan added:

"I shall buy my gown for the ball in Bristol; and I think of having a crimson satin. Deep cherry-colour I had decided on first; but the shopman here assures me that cherry-colour for evening wear is now going out of fashion, and that the lighter shade in red is much worn at routs and balls this season."

"Be sure you meet me, dear Margery, on the 5th, at Caxton Cross."

(To be continued.)

It is a wonderful thing that oysters, after they have been brought away from the sea, know by instinct the hour when the tide is rising and approaching their beds, and so, of their own accord, open their shells to receive their food from the sea, as if they were still at home.

HELEN'S DILEMMA.

—301—

CHAPTER IX.—(continued.)

IN vain he had argued and reasoned with himself; had told himself that he, Rupert Lynn, who had travelled over half the globe—who had seen and passed scatheless through the most brilliant circles in all the capitals of Europe—should come home to his own poverty-stricken halls, and fall foolishly, imprudently, ridiculously in love with his aunt's governess—a girl without money, without family, without friends—was almost incredible, and yet it was a stubborn fact!

What is hard to win, what is seldom seen, is ever the most prized. Little did Mrs. Despard dream that in rigidly immuring her pretty governess she was nursing and fanning a little stray spark from Cupid's torch, that, if left to itself, and to be blown about by the winds of circumstances, might have died out. Now it had become a bright, inextinguishable flame.

In his constant rides over to Kingscourt Sir Rupert was always buoyed up with the hope of a chance meeting with Miss Brown and his cousins—(his cousins were immaterial)—but he was invariably doomed to disappointment. Vainly he gazed down the shrubby walks, up the glades among the plantations, along the lanes, and fields, and roads.

Mrs. Despard was a wary old woman. The dear girls went out in the morning. It was much the best time of the day! It was a pity to spend all the early sunny hours moping indoors over books and water-colours. So, between eleven and one o'clock, Helen and her companions took their walks abroad—took their walks at a time when there was no fear of their encountering a good-looking cavalier on a handsome chestnut thoroughbred, cantering across the park!

And how was Helen getting on? Very well, indeed, she would have told you herself. She had acquired the entire affection and confidence of her pupils—she was contented with her humble lot—and happy. Their lives were quiet, and uneventful—they lived entirely apart from the great whirlpool of gaiety that was going on beside them.

Constant were the dinners, the little afternoon dances, the tennis parties; but Helen had never been bidden to join in any of these many pleasures. She would have been hardly human had she been able to repress a sigh or an occasional pang of envy, as imprisoned in the school-room those lovely balmy June afternoons, and deep in a dry German exercise—she saw carriage after carriage arrive full of gaily-dressed ladies, a drag, dog-carts, T-carts, bearing the lords of creation to one of Mrs. Despard's far-famed lawn-parties. How pretty the scene was! the white and coloured figures strolling from terrace to terrace, or sauntering under the trees, the hard fought games of tennis played by alim, active young girls, and flannel-garbed young men—the long tables set out in the shade covered with dazzling silver flowers, and all that was *recherché* in the way of ices and refreshments. And to crown all, the band! But how could any one learn lessons with a string bend in one's ears! and a crowd of attractive novelties parading before one's very eyes!

"It is no good doing lessons to-day—not a bit!" said Katie, slipping into the little room, where her sister and her governess were now battling with Wallenstein. "Come into my room, and give yourselves up to the pleasures of the moment. Come and see the fun!"

"I really think we must take a holiday," said Helen, who had been resolutely sitting with her back to the window, and endeavouring to nail her attention and Loo-Loo's to the book before her, and the sorrows of Max and Thekla. "Come, Loo-Loo, we will put them away for to-day," commencing to shovel off the books and put things a little to rights before accepting Katie's invitation.

"Katie's room" was her hobby; it opened off the school-room, and there it was that they drew, played the piano, and had tea. It overlooked

the grounds, and was one of the sunniest and largest in the house—and was one of the prettiest as well—being embellished by Katie's fingers and her father's purse. The chimney board and curtains, embroidered in satin, were Katie's own work, so were many lovely cushions, chair-backs, table-covers, and an exquisite screen. The tiles in the fire-place were painted by Katie, so were many excellent water-colours, and painted plaques that almost covered the walls. The deep, roomy wicker chairs had been dressed in pretty cretonne, with ribbon bows, by the same deft fingers; but the handsome grand-piano, the two large mirrors, the book-cases, full of valuable books, the Persian carpet, the writing-table, the velvet lounge, were all so many gifts to Katie from her devoted parent.

Katie was twenty years of age. "She had no occasion to be taken about and shown off in the great mart of fashion, poor child," said Mr. Despard; and she should have all her little fancies indulged at home.

Mrs. Despard made no objection; she and Blanche were somewhat afraid of Katie's searching eyes and sarcastic speeches, and were the last to object to her absenting herself from the suite of gorgeous rooms that they frequented. Mrs. Despard was not a little ashamed of her lame daughter, and was glad that she should keep herself in the background as much as possible.

Katie's extreme sensitiveness was not long in discovering this unpleasant truth, and she rarely joined the family circle.

"Now, Helen," she said, "draw up a chair to this window, and, as the showman says, you shall see what you shall see. Loo-Loo, you can kneel in front."

"There's mother over there, under the cedar, receiving. There's Blanche, acting as an aide-de-camp, in her new olive-green costume—rather dark; but she thinks dark colours suit her. It came from Paris, and cost thirty guineas. What do you think of it?"

"It looks nothing—not a bit better than her last winter's dress; and I shall tell her so!" said Loo-Loo, with malignant triumph. "Whom has she got hold of? Oh! Lord Featherhead; and there is mother bowing and smiling away to Lady Featherhead."

"Featherhead! she ought to be," interposed Katie, calmly. "Did you ever see such a figure? She must weigh twenty stone! She broke down a sofa the last time she was here. Ah! mother's leading her to an iron garden-seat—that ought to bear her."

"Do you see Flora Fox," said Loo-Loo, with animation, "ever near the tennis, talking to Dolly, in the cream costume! How pretty! ten times prettier than Blanche's. She certainly knows how to dress, does she not Katie?"

"If she was as careful about her 'h's' as she is about her clothes she would do!" replied Katie, sentimentally.

"You don't mean to say that she drops them!" asked Helen, aghast, looking over at a very elegant little figure with a wide brimmed, picturesque-looking hat, that was talking to Dolly with much gesticulation.

"Doesn't she!" returned Katie, impressively; "not in everyday life, and when she has on her company manners, but when she is angry, or excited, and, as it were, lets herself go. Someone sent her a sheet of paper with nothing but h's all over it. Wasn't it a joke! She was wild! She told Blanche! Blanche and she are bosom friends!"

"She has heaps of money," said Loo-Loo; "thousands and thousands—and she is to marry Dolly some day."

"You may say someday," responded Katie, scoffingly. "I will believe it when I see it. Ah! there's Rupert at last," as her cousin was seen crossing the pleasure-grounds with another gentleman, whom he introduced to his aunt and Blanche, and then stood aloof, eagerly eyeing every group; but his search was evidently unsuccessful. He strolled from one party to another, exchanging a few words here, an animated greeting there, but halting nowhere—still searching for someone. "Who can Rupert be looking for?" exclaimed Katie at last. "He is like a dog in a fair—do you see? He has gone all round

the tennis ground, and now he has turned down that shady walk, where, of course, he will be *de trop*. Now he is coming this way! Why, I declare, he is coming into the house!" she added, with a smile, as having caught sight of the three faces in the window he paused, raised his hat, and bent his steps towards the hall door. Two minutes later he was shaking hands with each in turn, and had disposed of his hat and cane, seated himself as if he had come to make a prolonged session. "Such ages since we have seen you, Ruperts!" said Katie. "What has become of you? You never condescend to come near us now. I suppose Miss Brown has frightened you!"

"When Fräulein Müller did not dismay me you cannot imagine that I should fear Miss Brown!" he answered, with a smile.

"Then why have you never been to see us?" reiterated Loo-Loo, imperiously.

"I am sure I can't tell you," he returned, looking slightly embarrassed. He was right; he certainly could not tell them the reason of his unavoidable and most unwilling absence. "Now I am here, of course you are going to give me tea," he continued, turning his conversation with his usual readiness of resource.

"Tea here with us, when you are one of the distinguished guests *à la tas*," cried Katie, with affected horror. "What will mother and Blanche say?"

"Shall I ring for it?" he replied, ignoring her question.

"You may if you like! and we will tell Cater, to bring us in some nice little dainty—some of the *débris* from the feast."

"Do you never go out in the afternoons now, Katie?" asked her cousin. "I haven't seen you anywhere about."

"No; mother has taken it into her head to send us out in the mornings—between eleven and one."

"Oh! then that accounts for it!" he said, half to himself. "Miss Brown," addressing himself to Helen, "is your discipline so strict that you never allow your pupils to leave the park? They have not been over to Cargew since I came home!"

"It is rather far," stammered Helen, "and we lunch at one o'clock."

"Is there no such thing as a half-holiday under the present *régime*?" he asked. "Do you remember the gipsy tea we had last year, Loo-Loo, and the condition of your Sunday frock?"

"Don't, Rupert! Every rose has its thorn. I never heard the end of it, but we had a lovely time! I'll tell you what," sipping her tea; "I have an idea!"

"What a novelty! Let us hear it at once!" said her cousin, imperiously.

"Do you know that Helen—I mean," correcting herself, "Miss Brown—has never been to a dance in England? Mother has never once asked her downstairs."

"My dear Loo-Loo!" exclaimed Helen, with a bright colour in her cheeks; "how can you say such things?"

"She never has," proceeded Loo-Loo, totally unabashed.

"Certainly not, why should she? Governesses are not supposed to go to people's houses to be amused and danced with. Our business is in the schoolroom, and it would be the last thing I would dream of, expecting your mother to number me among her guests!" said Helen, with more than ordinary warmth, and a still further accession of colour. "Of course you know Loo-Loo," to Sir Rupert, apologetically; "she does not in the least mean what she says!"

"We are all attention. Now, Loo-Loo, you may let us have your idea," said her cousin, standing up to carry Helen's tea-cup, and making no direct reply to her last remark.

"Well," replied Loo-Loo, straightening her back and clearing her throat; "my idea is that you should give a ball or a dance of some kind, Rupert!"

"A ball!" gasped Katie. "Why on earth should Rupert give one?"

"Why shouldn't he?" returned her sister, inexorably; "or a nice afternoon party—dancing

in the Hall, band in the little gallery, refreshments in the library, promenading in the grounds, and fireworks."

"And, in the name of folly, why fireworks?" he asked, with a laugh.

"Oh! because I should like them," impressively.

"Then you would honour me with your company if I gave this afternoon dance?" said her cousin, looking at her with unrestrained amusement.

"To be sure I would!" she answered, emphatically, tossing her fiery mane over her shoulder.

"Well, if Miss Brown and Katie will do me the same favour I will give the dance, so there's a bargain!"

"You know, of course, it is all nonsense, Sir Rupert. Loo-Loo is only joking!" said Helen, eagerly.

"But I am not. I will give an afternoon dance, and you will come," speaking to Helen individually, "and bring Loo-Loo."

"It will all depend on Mrs. Despard," said Helen. "I can make no promises, and it is not probable that I shall go."

"But you would like to go, Helen; you know you would. You told me you adored dancing, and you have not had one bit of pleasure nor one holiday since you came here," said Katie, with much decision.

"Then you will come; I'll make it all right with my aunt," he said, with an air of unwonted resolution; "and I shall expect you not only to come, but to give me two dances, Miss Brown."

"Oh! you dear delightful Rupert!" said Loo-Loo, casting herself into his arms. "Won't you make mother let me go too? She will do anything for you, and won't you dance with me?"

"Of course I will, Loo-Loo; and now I see the people moving, and I must really be off. Good-bye, Loo-Loo, good-bye Katie, good-bye Miss Brown," holding her hand in his for a second, "don't forget our five dances."

In another moment he was gone. "Do you not think Rupert nice, awfully nice, Miss Brown?" said Loo-Loo, when the door had closed behind him.

"Oh! Loo-Loo," ignoring the question, "how could you go on in such a way. What did you mean by asking your cousin to give a dance? I was perfectly ashamed of you."

"Because I wanted you to go to some dance, and I knew that if he gave one he would be sure to ask you. He likes you. Now, he hated Fräulein Müller like poison."

"So Rupert is to give a dance at Cargew next week," said Blanche, sailing into Katie's room an hour later. "He asked half the people who were here this evening. What can have put such an idea into his head?" walking up to the glass and smiling consciously at her own reflection.

"Not you, at any rate," cried Loo-Loo, emphatically; "and let me tell you that that new dress of yours is hideously unbecoming, miss. Fine feathers do not always make fine birds."

"Better to be a bird of any kind, than a little beast like you," returned her sister, angrily. "And oh! by-the-way, Miss Brown," as it were *à propos* of beasts, "it was a pity you were not down to-day. There was a gentleman here with Colonel Woodford who knew you out in India. He said he was so sorry not to have seen you. Mamma was going to send in for you, but I told her," with a spiteful look, "that you would not care about coming, and altogether you would be in a false position."

"A very false position, indeed," thought Helen. A false position that it overwhelmed her to imagine, and that her cousin Blanche was far from guessing, and equally far from supposing that for once in her life she had done Miss Brown a good turn.

CHAPTER X.

Two or three evenings later Mr. Despard expressed a wish that his daughter Katie and Miss Brown would come down to the drawing-room and be present at a large musical party.

In vain his wife combated his wishes,—

"Katie was not well—she was shy—she hated society—she was much happier upstairs."

"If she is shy, and hates society, it is because she never goes into it. I shall insist on her coming out more, and letting herself be seen," said Mr. Despard, with unwonted resolution.

"Letting herself be seen, indeed!" sneered her mother.

"Yes, madam," responded her husband, furiously; "be seen!—and there won't be a prettier girl in the room than my poor, lame Katie—except"—with sudden afterthought—"Miss Brown! You keep her mewed upstairs in such a way that people are beginning to declare that she is an idiot, and Miss Brown is her keeper. But they shall both be on view—no deception—on Tuesday next, as sure as I am here."

It was not often that Mr. Despard took such a high hand as this, but when he *did* he was obliged to have his way—his wife recouped herself in other matters.

She allowed Katie to pass without further discussion; but long and fruitless was the struggle she made to keep the governess upstairs—and the struggle was in vain.

Miss Brown received a very polite little note, requesting the pleasure of her company, written by the very reluctant hand of her exceedingly unwilling hostess at the dictation of her lord, and, on this occasion her master.

"Now, Helen, you must look your best! What are you going to wear?" said Katie, coming into her room the afternoon of the day in question. "Show me your dress—show me all your finery!"

"I have nothing but this," pointing to her black satin, which lay on the bed; "I have no regular evening dress."

"It will do," said Katie, turning it over with a gentle but critical hand; "it is long, and looks well-made. Turn the body into a 'V' shape, wear a lace fichu, deep lace elbow-sleeves, and a few natural flowers, and you will look lovely."

And Helen did look lovely that evening, even to Mr. and Mrs. Despard, who stared with incredulous amazement as the governess walked into the drawing-room—and, indeed, all eyes were turned on the beautiful girl in black.

The Despard family were bowet with many questions as to who she was! where she came from? and where she had hidden herself? Numbers asked for introductions, to which requests Mrs. and Miss Despard turned unheeding and deaf ears.

Now that Helen was proclaimed a "beauty" by the voice of public opinion Dolly, with the mean vanity of a small mind, became most disagreeably assiduous in his attentions—attentions that were hateful to Helen, and horrible to his mother, whose temper had been sorely tried by Miss Brown's "success," and who vowed to herself, over and over again, that this was the first and last occasion on which she should grace her drawing-room.

The men had no eyes for anyone else in the room—notably Rupert, who had actually ousted Dolly from his place, and was sitting half in the shadow of the window-seat, talking to the governess with the greatest animation—looking so very different to the intensely bored individual he had latterly seemed in ladies' society.

Of one thing she was determined—Miss Brown should not sing. She had a lovely voice, and would ensnare the miserably infatuated men still further were she suffered to display her accomplishments.

There had been some music already—a Mr. Mortimer, the pianist of the county, had played brilliantly; the great tenor of the neighbourhood had sung two songs; Miss Despard and Miss Fox had executed a feeble duet with regard to their "lodging being on the cold ground," when the hostess heard with dismay her husband loudly inquiring for Miss Brown.

"Where's Miss Brown? You should just hear her sing!" in a tone of voice that was anything but complimentary to the late performance.

Hurrying to Miss Brown, who was rising from the piano, having accompanied the last song, she whispered, pretty audibly—so audibly that Sir Rupert involuntarily heard,—

"Miss Brown, I do not wish you to sing. If you are asked, refuse—you understand me?"

"Certainly," replied Helen, with a little bow, and a very deep blush, moving aside.

"Why should we not have the pleasure of hearing Miss Brown, my dear aunt?" asked her nephew, suavely, to her unbounded amazement and annoyance.

Stung beyond the limits of patience at finding that he had overheard her request, she answered, in a sharp, distinct voice,—

"Because my drawing-room is only intended for the display of my friends' accomplishments. Miss Brown's arena and Miss Brown's proper place is the school-room!" moving stiffly away.

Helen's eyes filled with unbidden tears at this unkind and uncalled-for little speech. She retired from the piano, and sought a far distant and obscure seat in the neighbourhood of Katie. But she was followed by Sir Rupert, who was in a state of suppressed indignation.

"Why does my aunt not wish you to sing? What can be her reason?" he asked, drawing a chair up beside her, and gazing at her with sympathetic eyes.

"I cannot tell, but please do not say anything about it—you were not intended to have heard what she said!"

"But I did hear. Some day I shall come up to the school-room, and you will sing me a song, won't you—in your own arena, as my aunt calls it?"

"No; you must never come to the school-room again. Mrs. Despard heard of your visit the other day, and was very much displeased. You must never come again unless you wish to get me into dreadful trouble."

"I am the last person in the world who would wish to do that!" he answered, significantly.

"Nevertheless I am determined to hear you sing some day." After a pause he said, "I am afraid you are not very happy here. My aunt is a—peculiar woman. The life of a governess must be a hard one. This is your first attempt—your first situation, is it not?"

In his eyes there is nothing but friendly, anxious solicitude.

"Yes; this is my first place, as the servants would say. I came straight here from on board-ship," she answered, with a quiver of the lips.

"Rather a change from India! Tell me something about the gorgeous East. Did you like it? What kind of a life did you lead out there?" drawing closer, as though to invite her confidence.

"I—I would rather not talk of India, it is a painful subject," said Helen, looking down, with rising colour.

"Then you have no friends there now, I suppose?"

"None," replied Helen. "Indeed, I have hardly any friends; I am almost alone in the world!" whilst two large tears stood trembling in her eyes.

"May I be reckoned always as a friend, Miss Brown? More than a friend, if I might dare."

"Rupert, will you take Lady Daly into supper?" said a high, acrid voice, with alarming suddenness.

And Miss Despard, looking very white and very furious, stood before the sofa, upon which half the eyes in the room had been riveted during the last ten minutes.

They were certainly the handsomest couple in the room, and Sir Rupert Lyall was bending over Mrs. Despard's pretty governess as if she were the very lodestar of his existence.

Miss Despard and Miss Fox were, as we have heard, bosom friends—as much friends as two girls can be who are both in love with the same man. The scene before them roused their indignation, their jealousy, and their fear; they were quite ready to make one cause against this common enemy.

"What, is it supper time, already?" said Sir Rupert, with an incredulous start. "Why should I take in old Lady Daly?" he asked, discontentedly; "she would much rather go in with some old fogie of her own time of life than me. Why may I not have the pleasure of taking in Miss Brown?"

"Because, in the first place, rank goes with rank," replied Blanche, in a crushing tone; "and, in the second, Miss Brown is not going in to supper at all—there is no room for her at table! It is a sit-down supper," explanatorily. "We will send you something up to the school-room," she added, turning to Helen, her voice vibrating with venomous spite.

"Pray do not," said Helen, hastily. "I do not want anything, and I am going now," rising.

"In one instant," said Sir Rupert, laying a detaining hand on hers, and speaking with repressed passion. "You received an invitation to this entertainment, did you not, the same as the other guests? You did not come unasked, I know!"

"Yes; Mrs. Despard sent me a little note yesterday morning."

"And yet you are debarred from the piano and the supper-table! Certainly my aunt has rather curious ideas of hospitality!"

"Rupert, this is no way to speak of mamma, she has every right to do as she pleases in her own house!" said Blanche, angrily. "Now go and take in old Lady Daly at once!" imperiously.

"No, my dear Blanche, I shall not intrude any longer. Miss Brown shall have my place—ladies first. I am going home. Good-night, Miss Brown! Good-night, Blanche!" and, without another word, he walked away through the crowd, leaving his cousin literally glaring at the unlucky governess.

Helen lost no time in hurrying up to her own apartment (superfluous, of course). She locked her door, in the first instance, and then sat down and had a really good cry; but she was of an elastic temperament, and, after a little, dried her eyes, and began her favourite (and, indeed, only) means of soothing her excited mind—walking up and down the bare boards of her room from end to end.

She had had a hard life in some ways during the last six months, but most of the hardships were to be traced to herself. It was her own doing in the first instance—this sailing under false colours. Bitterly, bitterly, had she repented her mad project.

She had gained some things, however—the affection of her two younger cousins entirely on her own merits—that was something considerable. Had she come among them as the rich Helen Brown she never could have known them as she did now. No, nor her aunt and Blanche. She was aware of the true value of their good opinion. Little did they dream that the elighted and detested governess was their rich Tasmanian kinswoman.

Her uncle, by marriage, in him she had a warm friend; and Sir Rupert—here a hot blush stole over her face, deepening it to the very roots of her hair if words and looks were to be believed—he was anxious to be not merely a friend, but something more! What good fortune! what happiness for her! The obscure Miss Brown to be wooed and won (for herself alone) by such a man as Sir Rupert Lyall! But was it fair to keep him in the dark; and were things downstairs not becoming so strained and so unpleasant that an *éclaircissement* must be made? But not yet. She could not speak yet, she said to herself, as drawing out a foreign letter from her little writing case she went down on her knees by the rickety dressing-table, and endeavoured to read it by the light of a very miserable candle. She made a very pretty picture kneeling at the table in her trailing satin and soft laces; her lovely face shaded by one hand, as with eager eyes she perused the missive between her fingers. It was from an old friend and neighbour in Tasmania.

"Mount Sorel, Hobart Town, April 15."

"MY DEAREST HELEN,—

"Your letter received last mail. We are glad to hear that you are well and comfortable, and hope you will never have any reason to regret your most insane and foolish scheme. Tom is very angry with you still, and says that if you had a hard place, and a cross and disagreeable mistress it would serve you right."

"You know you are to stay as you are till the

end of the year. He won't write to the solicitors. Indeed, it would hardly be worth while, as he will be home himself in December, and he thinks that leaving you in your present dilemma is a very proper little piece of punishment."

"He sends his love all the same; he is always wondering how you will tell your aunt. By the way, you never told us what she was like, and if she was a nice motherly sort of body."

"I hope so, for your sake. I am glad your cousins seem so friendly. I should like to see their faces when they hear the ins and outs of your masquerade."

"I think it was the maddest thing I ever heard of! I had no idea that you were such a romantic goose. Tell me all about the fashions; are short dresses worn in the evening? Is it true that *crinolines* are coming in? How do people wear their hair? Any change? You might send me out a couple of papers with the fashions. I have not been in Melbourne since you left."

"The Lysters are going home this autumn. The Coopers have gone to live in Bathurst. We miss them a good deal. Nannie and Jack send their love, in which I join.—Your affectionate friend,
"EMILY TOWERS."

"P. S.—I have spoken to Tom again. I want him to write to Sharpe and Co., but he says you are to be the poor governess till he goes home. He won't let you off."

"There is nothing for it but patience," said Helen to herself as she folded up the letter; "and I have given my promise to Mr. Towers to keep the secret till he comes home. I wish I hadn't!" she added, rising; "but a promise in writing seems even more binding than a verbal one. Well, I suppose I must only wait as patiently as I can till December; and, after all, five months will soon go by! Only," she murmured, covering her face with her hands, "only for Sir Rupert I would not mind one bit!"

CHAPTER XI.

BLANCHE hastened to her mother, who was already en route for the supper-table on the arm of a county magistrate, and whispered to her the astounding intelligence "that Rupert had left the house in a rage because Miss Brown was not going in to supper, and had deserted Lady Daly, who was sitting alone on a distant sofa, looking swords and daggers!"

If anything could have added fuel to Mrs. Despard's temper this speech would have done so, for she was already in a highly volcanic condition—a condition which the laws of society alone enabled her to restrain from a violent eruption.

And, after all, Rupert had not gone home. In crossing the hall he had seen Katie slowly and painfully limping up the staircase, and had sprung to offer her his arm.

"What!" he asked with raised brows, "are you going away without supper, too?"

"Mother said I was to slip away when the people left the drawing-room," replied Katie, as she hobbled into her own sitting-room.

"As long as I'm sitting down mother does not mind," she added, bitterly; "but once I begin to move about mother cannot endure me in her sight, and she did not choose people to see me limping in to supper. I am sure I did not want to go!" passing her hand wearily across her forehead. "Where is Helen?"

"Miss Brown was not expected at supper either, and your mother sent her a message to that effect."

"Oh, Rupert, you don't mean it!" cried Katie, aghast.

"I assure you it is a painful fact. I heard your sister telling Miss Brown that she was not to go in to supper. Your mother also forbade her to sing if she was asked."

"How could she—how dare she treat her so?" cried Katie, with scarlet cheeks. "I know Helen won't stay to be treated in such a way! I know she will leave us!" bursting into tears.

"Mother can't bear her; but she can't dismiss her, because father thinks so much of her, but I see"—sobs—"she means to make her go. She is the only friend I've ever had!" said Katie, burying her face in her handkerchief, and sobbing.

"Why are you so fond of her, Katie?" said Sir Rupert, drawing his chair closer, and speaking in a low voice. "Tell me, Kitty."

"Oh! because of so many things. She is so good-tempered and nice, unselfish. She takes an interest in things I like—books, water-colours, work; we have so many tastes in common. She is not a bit like Blanche and other girls, who can think and talk of nothing but dress and gentlemen, and who look upon me as hardly human, because I am lame!"

It was not often that Katie alluded to her infirmity, and never before to Rupert, though he was like a brother to her and Loo-Loo. She knew him by many good deeds among the poor of his tenantry round Cargew.

She knew him, not only as their handsome, much-sought cousin—a shining star in society, but as a just and liberal master, an upright, chivalrous gentleman, and a firm friend.

"Katie!" he said, suddenly, "I am going to tell you a secret, and you are the only person in the world to whom I will confide it. Ah! here comes Cator with a nice little supper for you!" as one of the servants entered, bearing a tray with cold chicken, lobster salad and champagne.

"None for me, thank you! but you must have something to drink at once," he added, pouring out a glass of Jules Munn, and handing it to his pale-cheeked cousin. "Eat some of this chicken. You look quite done up and exhausted; and I will wait upon you," carving her a wing, "and we can talk by-and-by."

"And what about your great secret, Rupert?" she asked, after a few minutes' silence, when she had become somewhat composed, and had eaten some of the good things that her cousin kept heaping on her plate.

"What would you think—supposing you lose Miss Brown as your governess and companion—of having her for a cousin?" he replied, looking at her with grave expectancy.

"A cousin!" exclaimed Katie, laying down her knife and fork. "What on earth do you mean? Oh!" suddenly struck by something in her companion's face, "I see what you mean. But, Rupert, you would not—it would never do—never!"

"Why not?" he asked, imperiously. "Because there are hundreds of reasons. You are Sir Rupert Lynn, of Cargew, and she is only a poor governess, without a halfpenny in the world—without birth, and you know very well that you must marry some one with heaps of money!"

"I know very well that I won't, Miss Katie, with the wise face and the sage counsels. I will marry Miss Brown, if she will have me, and no one else. I am poor and proud! Why should I sell myself, as has been so frequently suggested? I should hate to live on my wife's money, and ten to one she would despise me as a poor-spirited wretch, who sold my old name and peace for no many solid thousands in the Three per Cent., and why should I not please myself? I am my own master. Helen is a lady; if anyone were to hear that she were a princess in disguise they would not be surprised!"

"And you really mean it—you really love her, Rupert?" said Katie, gazing into his handsome dark face with incredulous surprise.

"I have been in a bad way ever since I first saw her; it was a case of love at first sight, and all over with me long ago."

"She knows nothing, of course?" inquired Katie, with raised brows.

"No! nothing whatever. I hardly"—angrily—"got a chance of speaking to her!"

"Oh! Rupert, what will mother say and Blanche?" exclaimed Katie, dropping her hands in her lap, with a gesture of the liveliest dismay.

"They may say what they please, as long as Helen says yes!" he returned, with a smile. "And now, mind you keep my secret, Kitty. I must be going!" rising and approaching and

holding out his hand. "I know I have your good wishes, Katie, only you are afraid to speak out."

"You have my very best good wishes, although it is shockingly imprudent," said Katie, standing up and taking his proffered hand.

"That is my own kind little Kitty," he replied, stooping and imprinting a brotherly kiss on her broad forehead; "good-night!"

As he was crossing the sweep in front of the hall door to reach his dog-cart Sir Rupert nearly cannoned against his cousin Dolly, who, with a cigar in his mouth, was vacantly staring at the moon.

His face was very red—his eyes most curious looking.

Mr. Augustus Despard had evidently been supping, not wisely, but too well.

"Come long, old chappie!" clutching his cousin by the arm. "Come, take turn in the avenue, wait speak to you!"

"Dolly, my good fellow," exclaimed Rupert, "you are not yourself. Go in, for goodness sake, and go to bed. Go in!"

"Shan't go er bed. Come long," dragging his companion towards the avenue. "Want make out I am screwed, I shuppose. No more screwed than you are!"

Mr. Augustus had taken what they call in Ireland "the cross drop," and was not to be argued with or denied; so Sir Rupert, calling to his groom to follow with the trap, suffered himself to be led away—an unresisting victim.

"Got er secret to tell you, old boy."

"Secrets seem to be the rage this evening," thought Rupert to himself.

"Saw Miss Brown, our governess! Out-and-outer, ain't she!"

"Is this your secret?" said his cousin, in a frosty voice, struggling to free himself—but struggling in vain with Dolly, who clung to him like an octopus.

"Beastly spoony on her, I am, 'pon my soul—think I'll marry her, eh! All the fellers raving of her to-night; trust her for knowing what's what. Mrs. Augustus Despard will just take the shine out of the whole county."

Mr. Augustus was very unsteady on his legs, and during this speech made several violent tacks across the road.

It was a ludicrous sight to Sir Rupert's groom to see his tall, aristocratic-looking master the very unwilling prop of the tipsy cousin, and the recipient of his confidences—for confidences were betokened by the frequent wagging of his head.

"How do you know Miss Brown will have you?" asked Sir Rupert, contemptuously.

"Oh! she have me right enough—not bad-looking feller—rather fancies me, I can see!"—stagger. "Good property, elderly governor. Old boy's getting screwy on the legs. Have me! Course. Would a duck swim?"—stagger.

"Here, now, Dolly, that'll do! Take my advice, and leave Miss Brown alone," said Rupert, angrily. "You will only make an ass of yourself. I have no time for listening to your maunderings!" suddenly wresting himself from his cousin's grasp. "Come on, Campbell, bring on the trap," signing to his groom.

In another minute he had sprung into his place, taken up the reins and was bowling along in the moonlight, leaving Mr. Augustus sitting on the grassy bank at the side of the avenue.

"Say, tell you what it is!" confidentially addressing a young squire. "Believe the beggar's spoony on her himself, but he hasn't a chance with me!"

And here we will leave the hope of the Despards to get himself back to the bosom of his family as best he can.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR RUPERT LYNN was unmistakably in love, and for the first time, although he had actually reached his twenty eighth birthday!

It seemed strange that Cupid's torch had not been earlier applied to his lumbering susceptibilities; but, nevertheless, it was a fact.

Deeply fastidious in all things, he had an ideal

of his own—an ideal endowed with refinement, beauty, grace and youth, whose realization he had never yet come across, despite of all his wanderings.

But now his divinity had at last appeared in the unexpected form of his aunt's governess; and notwithstanding her lack of wealth and station, he was as ready to worship her as if she were the princess to whom she had been compared.

He now haunted Kingscourt at an earlier hour, and more than once had come across Helen and her companions, and enjoyed a delightful saunter through the lanes and fields, or under the wide spreading limes that bordered the sunniest side of the park.

No sympathetic tête-à-têtes were these. Katie and Loo-Loo were always at their side; in fact, Katie made a very strict little chaperone, and ruthlessly curtailed these golden moments. Much as she loved Helen, and well as she wished her, she could not bring herself to be an active promoter of her cousin's insanity.

These meetings were purely accidental. They were short, they were unsatisfactory; still, they were better than nothing, for Sir Rupert generally managed to carry away a look or a blush on which to exist for days!

The garden-party had been postponed in order that his aunt (on his mother's side) might be able to be present at Cargew, and enact the part of hostess in her nephew's house. She was coming, greatly to the mortification of Mrs. Despard, who would have richly enjoyed the rôle herself, but Rupert had whispered to Katie that "her mother would not be a satisfactory coadjutor." She might not be able to find room for all his guests.

And about those guests, about one guest especially, there had been wild work and warm discussion. However, Sir Rupert, nobly backed by Mr. Despard, had carried all before him. He had wrung a reluctant permission from his aunt. Miss Brown and the younger Miss Despard were to be allowed to honour his entertainment.

Behold them, then, that long-expected afternoon, dressed and ready to descend to the drawing-room to be inspected by the elders of the family.

Miss Despard, in another French frock, was wrestling with a pair of twelve-button gloves, and looking excessively cross; Mr. Augustus, redolent of scent, brilliant with studs, chains, rings, and garbed in a tight-fitting new suit, was standing in a lordly attitude, with his back to the empty fire-place, prepared to (as he called it) to "vet" the girls.

Mrs. Despard, a magnificent vision of lavender and black lace, was standing in the middle of the room, giving loud and angry orders about the carriage.

Enter to her Loo-Loo, in a neat white frock, broad blue sash, wide hat trimmed with daisies and black silken hose—Loo-Loo looking quite mild, ladylike, and even dignified, all-conscious of her new clothes. Then Katie, also in white. And last, but not least, Miss Brown, a radiant apparition, in a plain but exquisitely-made cream washing silk, a large cream hat, with drooping feathers, and quantities of soft lace round her neck and wrists.

Mrs. Despard put up her gold eye glass, and viewed the last arrival with a stony stare, surveyed her slowly from head to foot, from her cream-coloured gloves to her pretty little shoes.

"You are a strange anomaly, Miss Brown," she said, dropping her glass after an eloquent silence. "You come to me as governess, at the rate of twenty-five pounds a year—do you not?"

Helen merely coloured deeply, and bowed.

"And yet you can afford yourself forty-guinea sealskins and French costumes; you can manage to dress at the rate of two hundred a-year on twenty-five pounds! Really"—with a scathing smile—"you are an exceedingly clever young person!"

"I made this dress myself, Mrs. Despard," stammered Helen.

"You did not make the material nor the hat, I presume! However, we will not discuss the subject. You can all go"—waving a superb

hand—"the pony-carriage is at the side door; and, as you will be longer on the road, I wish you to start at once."

The humble pony-carriage was, however, soon passed by the lofty landau and its high-stepping bays, who whirled by in a cloud of dust.

Our friends reached Cargew by half-past five. It looked to the very best advantage that lovely July evening, half-hidden in its deep walls, its long deserted terraces and gardens gay with many brilliant groups, its long-closed stately reception-rooms once more open to the sun, and once more re-echoing the sounds of many merry voices, gay laughter, and music.

Lady Vane, Sir Rupert's aunt, garbed in rich brocade, stood outside on the terrace receiving all arrivals—a very stately, upright dame, with clear-cut features and piercing brown eyes. Those eyes rested for more than the conventional second on the fair, slight girl who was presented to her by her nephew with a courtesy, a deference, that was almost significant. But no; Rupert would never be mad enough to lose his head about a lovely face—and a lovely face it was—when that face belonged to his cousins' governess.

Refreshments were served in the library, the drawing-room was devoted to the dowagers, the hall to dancing, and an elaborate cold dinner, or supper, as it might be called, was laid out in the grand old dining-room. The long, long table was covered with family plate and priceless family china. The green-houses and gardens had been ravaged for flowers. Scarlet geranium and maiden-hair alone ornamented the table in vases, brilliant, and feathery masses.

Piles of strawberries in deep dishes, and silver jugs and bowls of clotted cream were interspersed among the most dainty and delicate viands, garnished according to their kind, with miracles in white sugar, or truffles.

A private view of this most appetizing sight had been obtained by Loo-Loo, but Helen had long ago been revolving among the dancers in the hall.

The beautiful Miss Brown was quite a noted person, the cynosure of all, and the desired partner of every male dancer. Several pairs of eyes followed her, as she floated round the room with very varied feelings. Mrs. Despard's need scarcely be described, nor her eldest daughter's. Mr. Augustus, eye-glass in orb, regarded her with a sense of serene complacency, and the air of a future proprietor.

Katie sat in a corner and followed her friend with looks of sincerest admiration. After all, who could wonder at Rupert? Where would be ever again find so lovely a wife!

Somehow Helen looked different to-day. She seemed entirely to have cast off the retiring, almost humble, carriage that distinguished her at Kingscourt, and to have taken her place among the queens of society as their equal, not merely in beauty, but in birth.

Look at her now, talking to Sir Roland Fortescue with as much ease of manner, with as ready words and smiles as if she were the heiress of thousands a year. Dancing and the unusual excitement had brought a colour to her cheeks and a brilliancy to her deep blue eyes that made her marvellously lovely. No wonder that everyone was whispering about her—no wonder that Sir Rupert found it hard to play the part of a graceful and impartial host, but he fulfilled his onerous duties to perfection. The dance was going off with a verve and abandon, and, thanks to his exertions, promised to be the success of the season.

And yet he had not had one dance with her yet. Their dance—for she would only give him one—was to be after supper, and when the band struck up the first strains of "La Berceuse" he was already beside her—but so was Dolly—Dolly, who had eaten and drunken, and was filled, was clamouring in a thick, hoarse voice for "Just this waltz," as if Helen's card had not been crammed hours ago!

Placing her hand on Rupert's arm she passed away from Dolly, who, looking the very incarnation of champagne, slowly subsided into her vacant place, and, after a few moments' aimless

nodding, laid his heavy head upon the neighbouring sofa-cushion, and was lost in the land of dreams!

Sir Rupert, with his continental training, his tall, graceful figure, was an ideal partner; and Helen, though she had not had much practice beyond two or three balls at Hobart Town, was naturally a born dancer, and could suit her step to any other person's at a moment's notice.

The first dance with the beloved one is indeed a thing to be remembered; and Rupert looked into Helen's eyes and believed that he had been suddenly transported to the seventh heaven.

Alas! everything must have an end—no matter how enthralling. The waltz was over; people began to drift out into the garden, or among the long suite of rooms; but Rupert followed neither.

Opening a swing door, and holding it back for his partner to pass, he said,—

"I have something to say to you—something to ask you. Will you come up to the picture-gallery?"

They encountered various couples coming and going on the stairs, for to "see the pictures" was one of the favourite baits by which the flirts of *à la vie* in that "sweetly romantic old gallery."

It was not merely to see the pictures that her host was leading Helen upstairs. No! There was a grave resolute expression on his firmly-set lips that betokened a mind set on something far beyond the portraits of his ancestors.

"This is the place where we first met," he said, standing just inside a low doorway, near the well-remembered mullioned window.

"It is!" assented Helen, with wonderful composure.

"We were masquerading in the characters of a couple of my ancestors—husband and wife—were we not? Helen, may I look upon it as a good omen?" he asked, in a low voice.

Helen made no reply, and he proceeded, more hurriedly,—

"I need not tell you that I love you, Helen; for you know it well. I gave this dance on purpose to have a chance of seeing you, and speaking to you alone—a chance I am never likely to have in my aunt's house. Tell me, darling, for the golden moments are flying—do you care for me, and will you be my wife?"

For some seconds there was no reply. His beautiful lady-love never moved—never opened her lips—but kept her eyes fixed on the floor, whilst the rapid change of colour from crimson to white alone betraying that she had not been indifferent to his request.

"Do you know what you have been saying?" she asked, at length, raising her face to his, and speaking with extraordinary self-command, but with lips devoid of colour. "You have been asking me, your aunt's obscure and penniless governess, to be—be your wife—to take rank with one of these"—pointing to a very forbidding, haughty-looking matron. "You cannot have reckoned the cost."

"I have, fully!" he answered, firmly. "You—if you will, and no one else—shall be the future Lady Lynn, and if all my ancestresses were as lovely, as worthy, and as good as you are, their husbands must have been happy men."

"Think of what your aunt—of what every one will say!" impressively.

"I do not care two straws for what my aunt may think or say; and as to every one else, there will be but one opinion. They will all say that I am the luckiest fellow in the county of Kent—that is, if your answer will be 'yes!' Come, Helen!" taking both her hands in his—"you have conjured up every objection you can think of, and left me in suspense. Tell me the truth at once. Do you care for me, or not?"

glancing down into her face, with his heart in his eyes. Then, as he met hers, that told a story more convincing than any words. He suddenly raised her cool, slim little hand, and pressed it to his lips with passionate tenderness. Dropping her hand, and insinuating his arm round her waist, he said:—"Then I may consider that you belong to me for the future!"

"Yes!" stammered Helen, shrinking back, and evading his embraces. "But I have something to say to you first!"

"You don't care for any other fellow? You have never been engaged before?" he asked, apprehensively.

"Never!" she replied, emphatically.

"Nor I!" he answered, with conscious pride. "You are the first girl I ever cared for. I began to think it was not in me ever to fall in love, that I was getting past that stage. I never saw a face I cared to look at twice in all my wanderings—I never heard a voice that had the power to make my heart go one beat faster till I met you here, in this very spot. Somehow, when I held you a trembling little prisoner in my arms that moonlight night three months ago I had a sort of conviction that I had met my fate! You know I am poor, Helen! I have not much to offer you. The estate is encumbered, and it will take years to pay off the burdens on it; still we will be able to manage well enough. You have never been used to riches, and I am sure I can make you happy. You believe me, don't you, my darling!"

"I believe you to be the truest, and most chivalrous gentleman that ever took a wife of low estate!" replied his companion, looking at him with misty eyes.

"And when will you marry me? When am I to take you from that house of bondage?" he asked, eagerly.

"Not before December—if then!"

"December!—nonsense! You shall go and stay with my Aunt Vane, and be married from her house within the next six weeks! What is the good of any delay? I shall tell Mrs. Despard that she must look out for another white slave this very evening, for that you have found another situation!"

"You will do nothing of the kind, Sir Rupert!"

"Rupert!" corrected her lover, hastily.

"Then, Rupert, our engagement must remain unknown and unsuspected for the present. Listen to me for an instant!" she proceeded, speaking in a low voice. "I am not what I seem. I am a deception—a sham!"

"You are not what you seem!" he echoed. "Do you mean to tell me that you are not Miss Brown—that you have another name?" he asked, reproachfully.

"No—I am Miss Brown—in that I am Miss Brown, and that," blushing deeply, "I love you, Rupert. I am what I seem, but otherwise I am not. I know I am speaking in parables, but if I were to tell you a part I must tell you all. In three months' time you shall know *everything*. It is not in my power to enlighten you *now*!"

"I don't understand you!" he said, with grave incredulity.

"Then I will tell you: that in a moment of folly I put myself into a false position, little—little dreaming of the consequences. The only person who has power to release me refuses to do so till the end of the year—till he comes from abroad, till he thinks I have been sufficiently punished for my folly!"

"He! Then there is a man at the bottom of it!" cried Rupert, with an amount of jealous suspicion in his voice, and face, that showed he would be an easy prey to the green-eyed one.

"A man who is old enough to be my grandfather—a man with grown-up sons, you foolish Rupert!"

"You will swear to me that you never cared for any fellow before!" persisted her lover, anxiously.

"Never! on my word of honour. Why, I hardly know a man—a young man to speak to!" she added, with a reassuring smile.

"What? Not in India?" he cried, with wrathful amazement.

"Oh! we won't talk of India!" she returned, colouring brilliantly. "At any rate not now."

"Then I am to wait on probation three whole months!" said her lover, gloomily. "I call it hard lines—awfully hard lines!"

"Your patience shall have its reward; it shall indeed!"

"Well, give me a first instalment then in the

shape of a kiss, Helen!" he said, stooping towards her, and bringing his cheek very close to hers. "Won't you kiss me!"

"You—you may take one!" she returned, in a low voice, and, thus permitted, he pressed his lips to her pretty little curved mouth for the second time in his life. "And will you trust me, Rupert!" she asked, after a moment's silence.

"I trust you, my darling, as I would the angels of Heaven themselves. My heart and happiness are in your keeping!"

"I will never abuse the trust you have placed in me. You shall never regret your confidence and your generosity!" replied Helen, impressively.

"You are a foolish fellow," she added, with a smile rippling round her dimples. "You are not merely going to marry a girl without position or money. But as if that were not bad enough you are going to marry a girl with a secret! I wonder what your aunt would say if she knew! Have you fully considered what a wretched match you are making!" regarding him curiously. "Think of what the world will say!"

"I don't care a fig for the world. You are all the world to me," he answered, valiantly.

"And you will always trust me, no matter what happens, no matter how appearances may be against me, no matter what you may hear, or even see?"

"I have given you my promise. I never break my word."

"Give me a pledge as well!" she urged, persistently.

"I will give you this though it is not necessary"—taking off his signet ring. "You shall have a regular engaged ring as well, of course. I will send for it to-morrow."

"No, no," she replied, letting him place the gift on her third finger. "I will keep this till—till December; then you may give me the other ring—the engagement one."

"What are you talking about!" he said. "The ring I will give you then will be a plain gold one."

"And you will never love me less than you do now, and never distrust me!" she whispered, as they paused ere leaving the gallery, and returning to commonplace life.

"Never," he answered, with his soul in his eyes.

It was a rash promise; but what man born of woman would have replied otherwise, with that perfect face, and those pleading eyes, confronting him in the silver moonlight?

(To be continued.)

DIANA'S LESSON.

—101—

"Five pounds of grapes!" said old Mrs. Whitehead, in astonishment. "Are you quite sure that you understood your mistress's order, Emma? White grapes are three shillings a pound, and surely for so small a dinner party as this—"

"There's no mistake, ma'am," said Emma, pertly. Servants will soon learn the spirit of their superiors, and Emma knew that young Mrs. Whitehead was not particularly partial to her husband's stepmother. "I took the order myself, and it ain't likely I should be mistaken."

"Emma is quite right," said Mrs. Gregor Whitehead, who came in at that moment, a handsome brunette in a pink cashmere morning-dress, trimmed with black velvet—rather a contrast to the neat calico gown which her mother-in-law was accustomed to wear about her morning avocations at home. "And I do wish, mamma, you wouldn't interfere!"

The old lady's serene brow flushed. "My dear," she remonstrated, "I do not wish to meddle with your concerns, but I really fear that Gregor's income—"

"Gregor's income is his own, to spend as he pleases!" interrupted the young lady. "And you seem to forget, mamma, that people don't live nowadays as they did when you were a girl."

Mrs. Whitehead said nothing more. It was not the first time, nor yet the second, that she had been given to understand by Mrs. Gregor Whitehead that her interposition in household affairs was unwelcome.

The stepson, whom she loved with as fond a devotion as if he had been her own child, had married a beautiful city girl, and settled in London.

So far all was well, although Mrs. Whitehead had secretly hoped that he would love sweet Margery Belton, the clergyman's daughter, of Ashton, and settle down on the old farm, as his father before him had done.

Yet, if Gregor was happy, she also would rejoice, she assured herself, even although he preferred Diana Crose to Margery Belton, and a city's bustle to the sweet peace of the vales and glens.

If Gregor was happy! Yes, there was the question. And sometimes Mrs. Whitehead feared that he was not, in spite of his smiles and assumed cheerfulness.

It had been his fondest hope that his mother might be one of his household after his marriage. Mrs. Whitehead had hoped so too; but after this, her first visit, she felt that the dream was in vain.

"Oil and water will not mix," she said to herself, with a sigh; "and I belong to a past generation."

As she left the store-closet, where Diana and her cook were holding counsel as to a proposed dinner-party, she went slowly and spiritlessly up to the breakfast-room, where Gregor was reading the morning paper before the fire.

"Gregor," she said, a little abruptly, "I think I had better go back home this week."

"Mother!" he remonstrated.

"I don't think that Diana wants me here."

Gregor Whitehead reddened.

"I hope, mother," he said, "she has not said anything to—"

"It is not natural that she should need my presence," said the old lady, gently. "I might have known it; now I am certain of it. Home is the best place for me. But remember one thing, dear Gregor. Do not outspend your income. Diana is young and thoughtless. You yourself are inexperienced—"

"Oh, it's all right, mother!" said the young man, carelessly. "But I did hope that you could be happy here."

Mrs. Whitehead shook her head.

"I shall see you sometimes," said she. "If ever you are in trouble, Gregor—you or Diana either—you will know where to come."

So the old lady went away from the pretty boudoir of a house with its bay windows, its Turcoman portieres, and the boxes of flowers in all the casements.

"Diana," said the young husband, as he studied over the list of weekly bills a short time subsequently, "I believe my mother was right. We are outrunning our income."

"Pshaw!" said Diana, who was sewing point-lace on a rose-coloured satin reception-dress; "what has put that ridiculous idea into your head, Gregor?"

"Facts and figures," answered Gregor. "Just look here, Di."

"But I don't want to look!" said Diana, impatiently turning her head away, "and I won't—so there! Of course one can't live without money, especially if one goes into society."

Gregor whistled under his breath.

"But, Diana," said he, "if a man's income is five pounds a month and he spends ten how are the accounts to balance at the year's end?"

"I don't know anything about balances and accounts," said Diana, with a sweet, sportive laugh. "How do you like this dress, Gregor?" holding up the gleaming folds of the pink satin.

"I shall wear it on Thursday evening."

"Do you think, Di," said the young man, gently, "that it is wise for us to go so much into society on our slender income?"

"That arrow came from your mother's quiver, Gregor," said Diana, with another laugh. "She was always preaching about your 'income.'"

"And, after all," said Gregor, "what do we care for the fashionable people to whose houses

we go, and whom we invite to our parties? They wouldn't one of them regret if we were to go to the Rocky Mountains to-morrow."

"I would as soon die at once as live without society!" said Diana. "Do leave off lecturing me, Gregor. Society is all that makes life worth having for me."

And, with a deep sigh, Gregor held his peace. That was a long, lonely winter for Mrs. Whitehead, senior.

Snow set in early; the river froze over, as if it were sheeted with iron, except in the one dismal place down in the ravine, where a restless pool of ink-black water boiled and bubbled at the foot of a perpendicular mass of grey rock, under the shadow of gloomy evergreens; the sunshine glittered with frozen brightness over the hills, and the old lady was often secretly sad at heart as she sat all alone by the big fireplace, where the logs blazed in the twilight.

And as the New Year passed, and the bitter cold of January took possession of the frozen world, a vague apprehension crept into her heart.

"Something is going to happen," she said. "I am not superstitious, but there are times when the shadow of coming events stretches darkly across the heart. Something is going to happen!"

And one afternoon, as the amber sunset blazed behind the leafless trees, turning the snowy fields to masses of molten pearl, she put on her fur-lined hood and cloak.

"I will go and take a walk," she said. "I shall certainly become a hypochondriac if I sit all the time by the fire and nurse my morbid fancies like this."

She took a long, brisk walk down by the ruins of the old mill, through the cedar woods, across the frozen swamp, and then she paused.

"I will come back by the Black Pool," she thought. "It is a wild and picturesque spot in winter, with icicles hanging to the tree boughs, and weird ice-effects over the face of the old grey rock."

It was a dark and gloomy place, funereally shaded by the hemlocks, which grew there to a giant size; and when Mrs. Whitehead got beneath their boughs she started back.

Was it the illusive glimmer of the darkening twilight—or was it really a man who stood close to the edge of the Black Pool?

"Gregor! Oh, Gregor, my son!"

She was barely in time to catch him in her arms and drag him back from the awful death to which he was hurling himself.

When they reached the room where the blazing logs cast a ruddy reflection on the red moreen curtains Mrs. Whitehead looked into her stepson's face with loving eyes.

"And now, Gregor," said she, "tell me all about it. The Lord has been very good to you in saving you from a terrible crime."

"Mother, why did you stop me?" he said, recklessly. "I am a ruined man. I shall be dishonoured in the sight of the world! Death would be preferable, a thousand times, to disgrace!"

"Gregor," said the old lady, tenderly, "do you remember when you used to get into boyish scrapes at school? Do you remember how you used to confide your troubles to me? Let us forget all the years that have passed. Let us be child and mother once again."

So he told her all—of the reckless expenditure on Diana's part—his own, also, he confessed—which had woven itself like a fatal web about his feet—of the unpaid bills, the clamorous tradesfolk, the threats of public exposure, which had driven him at last to the forgery of his employer's signature, in order to free himself from one or two of the most pressing of these demands.

"And if my investment in Erie bonds had proved a success," he said, eagerly, "I could have taken up every one of the notes before they came due. But there was a change in the market, and now—now the bills will be presented next week, and my villainy will be patent to all the world! Oh, mother, mother! why did you not let me fling myself into the Black Pool?"

"Gregor," said his stepmother, "what is the amount of these—these forged bills!"

"Two thousand pounds!" he answered, staring gloomily into the fire.

"Exactly the amount of the Government bonds which your father left me," said Mrs. Whitehead. "They would have been yours at my death. They are yours now, Gregor!"

"Mother, you don't mean—"

"Take them," said Mrs. Whitehead, tenderly pressing her lips to his forehead. "Go to London the first thing to-morrow morning and wipe this stain from your life as you would wipe a few blurred figures from a slate. And then begin the record of existence anew."

And up in the little room which he had occupied as a child Gregor Whitehead slept the first peaceful slumber which had descended upon his weary eyelids for many and many a night.

In the midnight train from London came Diana Whitehead to Tne Hemlocks, with a pale, terrified face and haggard eyes.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she sobbed, "where is he—my husband! He has left me, and the letter on the dressing-table declared that he would never return alive! Oh, mother, it is my fault! I have ruined him! Help me, comfort me, tell me what I shall do!"

Mrs. Whitehead took her daughter-in-law's hand, and led her softly to the little room where her husband lay sweetly sleeping.

Diana drew a long sobbing sigh of relief, and clasped her hands together as if in mute prayer at the sight.

"Hush!" said the old lady; "do not wake him. He is worn out, both in mind and body. Only be thankful that Heaven has given him back to you, almost from the grave."

And as the two women sat together by the blazing logs Mrs. Whitehead told Diana the whole story of the meeting at the Black Pool.

"Mother," said Diana, with a quivering lip, "it is my doing. You warned me of this long ago. Oh, why did I give no heed to your words! I deserve it all!"

"You will do better for the future, my dear," said the old lady, kindly. "Only be brave and steadfast."

So the young people went back to London, and commenced the world anew, withdrawing from the maelstrom of "society," and living within themselves. Mrs. Whitehead, senior, came with them, and Diana is learning the art of housekeeping under her direction.

"Mamma is an angel!" says the young wife, enthusiastically. "And if I could only be just like her, I should have no higher ambition."

VIOLA'S PORTION.

—30—

(Continued from page 417.)

"Yes, of course! I said there was an American letter for father that morning, which he said at once was his, and showed me an envelope in the corner of which his name was written, very small, whilst the address on it was father's," cried Vera.

"That was the letter without doubt," cried Cassidy. "I ought to have cabled—"

"He would probably have succeeded in intercepting the cable if you had," said Mr. Chesterfield. "Well! luck, and our being such strangers, favoured them—but I assure you, Tom, when we first saw that poor creature upstairs, Catherine and I were taken aback."

"I can fancy it," replied Tom. "She isn't like my Viola one bit. I say, though, George, when the police have looked into this matter I guess we shall learn a good deal about the Moores we didn't know before. Remember they were but casual acquaintances of mine, and one meets with very odd people in California, let me tell you. I shouldn't be surprised if the police knew far more about them than we do—the New York fellows at any rate!"

And so it turned out. Jerome Blennerhasset, as he had called himself, or Edward Moore, or—he had many other aliases—was not at all a

stranger to the police; he had been in trouble before, and the man who was in custody with him was even better known than he. Against Estelle, however, the police had nothing—she had been regarded as a suspicious character, but either through good-luck or superior cleverness she had managed to keep beyond arm's length of the law, and now death had saved her from sharing with her brother the penalty of the crime they had assisted each other in committing.

As to Horton, Tom Cassidy always believed that he too was accessory to it, and knew quite well what was going on; but there was no evidence to that effect, and his name did not appear in the trial, which ended in a sentence of penal servitude for life to the principal offender, and seven years to his coadjutor.

Estelle was buried very quietly in the little church at Churton, and a cross, with the simple mention of her name and the date of her death, was placed by Cecil and Vera over her grave, for, bad as she was, Vera could not forget what she owed her, that she had saved Cecil's life at the sacrifice of her own, and that the dead girl had loved her.

A few days later the real Jerome Blennerhasset arrived at the Grange, and there was no wonder expressed by any of the party that he should be the lovely Viola Cassidy's intended—a frank, handsome, genial American gentleman, worthy of her and likely to make her happy, and whom the girl loved with all her heart and soul.

Three months later a double wedding took place. Cecil and Vera persuaded Viola and Jerome that there was no time like autumn for a wedding tour in Switzerland, and that their marriage might as well take place at Churton as in London.

It was nearly Christmas before Tom Cassidy and the Blennerhassets returned to America. The diamonds were not sold—Jerome would not hear of their being parted with—Viola should keep them, he said, for he had money enough and to spare for her and himself.

So the diamonds were set in London, and Viola's wedding present to Vera was a beautiful necklace and star of the lovely gems; the rest she took back to New York with her, and Mrs. Jerome Blennerhasset's diamonds are amongst the finest in that city. She has other jewels, however, to which these are but nothing in her estimation—a lovely girl and boy, with whom, as she proudly says, there are no children in New York to be compared, and none in London, or all England either for that matter, except, perhaps, Vera's, who she admits are in their way almost as perfect as her own.

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

"ARE you loaded?" asked the pistol of the shot-gun. "No," said the latter, "I'm shot." Then both exploded with laughter.

WIFE: "Tommy doesn't seem to be afraid of policemen." Husband: "Why should he! His nurse was a very pretty girl."

YOUR son is a play-actor, you say, Mr. Maginist? "Faith, he is," replied the old man. "And what *elles* does he play!" "Faith, he rolls up the curtain."

KIND-HEARTED Old Gentleman: "There! there! Don't cry. Be a little man." Injured Child: "How can I be a little man when I'm a little g-g-girl! Boo-hoo!"

"My husband and I never have a discussion before the children. If I see a quarrel coming on we always send them out." "I thought I had seen them in the street very often."

DUDELEIGH: "Aw Miss Gaygirl, I suppose I may put your refusal of me down as—aw—anti-pathetic to living in a flat!" Miss Gaygirl: "No; to living with one."

"I was not aware that you knew him," said Tom Snack to an Irish friend the other day.

"Knew him!" he exclaimed. "I knew him when his father was a boy."

SHE: "You must remember that ours was a summer engagement." He: "That means, if you see anyone you like better, you'll break it!" "Yea." "And if I see anyone I like better—" "I'll sue you for breach of promise."

He would have gathered her in a warm embrace, but she waved him back. "No," she said imperiously. "You crush my heart," he protested. "Better thy heart," she answered, "than my sleeves."

HUNGRY Customer (angrily): "Bring me some lunch." Waiter: "But you've already ordered a breakfast, sir!" Customer: "Yes, but it was breakfast time then, and I've been waiting ever since."

SIMPSON: "I hear that Brown walks twenty miles every Sunday. Wonder it doesn't wear him out." Robinson: "Well, a man can't rest seven days a week. Brown has a position in the Civil Service, you know."

Mrs. GRUMPER (reading description of a wedding): "I don't see why they should call the groom's attendant the 'best man.'" Grumper: "Humph! That's easy. 'Cause he has sense enough to remain single, of course."

AN Irishman went into a Dublin shop and inquired: "An' did you put in the papers you wanted a man?" "Yes," said the shopkeeper, "and I distinctly stated that all applications must be made by mail." "An' faith, an' who is it but meelf that's a male for sartin'!"

THE other day a poor countryman was summoned before the magistrates of St. Alban's bench for arrears of poor-rate. On being asked on what ground he objected to pay, he innocently replied: "Lord bless you, gentlemen, I have no ground at all; mine's only a cottage."

MR. RICHMANN: "I don't demand that my daughter shall marry wealth, but I do insist that the man she marries shall have brains enough to get along in the world." Young Simpsure: "Well, I think I've shown pretty good judgment in selecting a father-in-law, don't you?"

TRIN: "Halloo, Tagg, what's that sign on your front door, 'No admittance except on business'?" Tagg: "There have been so many young men calling on my daughters, and their visits have been so fruitless, that I have adopted this plan to reduce the surplus."

MRS. WAYUPP: "Don't invite those Highbury girls again. Their father has disgraced himself." Miss Wayupp: "Impossible! He is a noted scientist, and president of a college." Mrs. Wayupp: "Yes, but the vulgar fellow has recently been making a study of the trade winds. It's in all the papers, too."

AN absent-minded professor was writing at his desk one evening when one of his children entered. "What do you want?" he asked. "I cannot be disturbed now." "I only want to say good-night, papa," replied the child. "Never mind now," as he instantly resumed his writing; "to-morrow morning will do as well."

MR. HAYSEED (arriving at London hotel): "I s'pose I kin hear the gong here when it rings for dinner, can't I?" Clerk: "We have no gong. We have breakfast from six to eleven, dinner from twelve to six, supper from six to eleven." Mr. Hayseed: "Gracious! If I'm bound to be eatin' all them hours how am I to get time to see the town?"

THE lady was seeking to be disagreeable to the young army officer. "I suppose," she remarked, with a faint sneer, "that some time in your career you have beaten a retreat?" "I have, madam," he admitted, without a blush. "Ah, indeed! Will you tell me how you did it?" "Certainly, madam. I did it by making an advance. That beats a retreat, doesn't it?"

DRAMATIC AUTHOR: "Mr. Manager, may I venture to ask whether my three-act play has been accepted?" Manager: "Well, you see, the three members of the reading committee have gone through it, and they have come to the conclusion that one act will have to be struck out." Author: "Oh, there is no difficulty about that; it is not so bad after all." Manager: "No, but unfortunately each of the members wants to strike out a different act."

SOCIETY.

THE Duke and Duchess of York are to remain in town until the end of March.

PRINCESS LOUIS OF BATTENBERG, who is now at Malta, will pay a visit to the Queen while Her Majesty is at Cimiez, after which she is to return to Darmstadt for the summer.

It is the Queen's intention to personally hold at least one of the early Drawing Rooms this season; this will be welcome news to intending *débutantes*, and cause a tremendous number of applications to be made for admission to the earliest of these this month.

The wedding of the Crown Prince and Princess of Denmark's eldest daughter is at present fixed to take place in March, and it is probable that the Princess of Wales will attend it. There will be only a quiet ceremony, owing to mourning for the late Emperor of Russia, and only near relatives will attend.

THE Queen has seen four Czars of Russia, three Emperors of Germany, two Kings of Italy, and a number of minor kings in Italy, several sovereigns in Spain, a king, an emperor, and several republics in France.

THE Queen of Greece has the distinction of being the only woman admiral in Europe. She was made admiral of the Russian fleet by the late Czar. She was always a lover of the sea, being a daughter of a Grand Admiral.

HIS MAJESTY takes a great interest in the upbringing of the little Duke of Albany, who is a very sweet-dispositioned little lad and quick and clever, though not robust. Her Majesty, who loves all children, and is never happier than when surrounded by her young relatives, is particularly fond of those of her beloved youngest son.

It is probable that the Princess of Wales and the young Princesses will go to Mentone early in March to meet the Dowager Empress of Russia, and the Queen of Denmark is also expected there about the same time. It is possible that Queen Louise may go on, later in the spring, to Athens on a visit to the King and Queen of the Hellenes.

THE Queen will leave Windsor for the Riviera on Tuesday, March 19th, if the course of public affairs admit of her departure from England on that day. Her Majesty will therefore arrive at Cimiez on the evening of Thursday, the 21st, and her present intention is to stay there for five weeks, and then go to Germany for ten days or a fortnight before returning to England. The Queen will cross from Portsmouth to Cherbourg on the outward journey, and the return passage in the *Victoria* and *Albert* will be from Flushing to Port Victoria, near Sheerness. The Queen is to get back to Windsor, according to present arrangements, on Friday, May 10th.

In addition to the collapsible canvas sphere signals which Prince Louis of Battenberg in collaboration with Captain Percy Scott, R.N., has produced, he has invented an instrument by means of which the captain of any ship is immediately apprized when she is off her course. This contrivance, which was devised by Prince Louis during the time that he was Naval Adviser at the War Office to the Inspector-General of Fortifications, has been subjected to the most crucial experiments, and has come out of them so successfully that the Admiralty has ordered its issue throughout the Fleet. It is to be officially known as the "Course Indicator."

THE Emperor Franz Josef has a positive horror of reckless expenditure. Account is kept of every guilder spent, and if, at the end of the year, his Imperial Majesty deems the total too high, economy must be practised during the following months, and the deficit made good. In the apartment where the Emperor works stands a carved chest made of cherrywood, and in this are stored his private accounts; here also are hidden away many papers of vital importance, for should the Ministers present a petition, or other document, which his Majesty objects to sign, it vanishes into the chest never to be seen again, and it is understood no new copy may be prepared.

STATISTICS.

ABOUT 2,000 soldiers are discharged yearly for bad conduct.

THE average amount of sickness in human life is ten days per annum.

THE bankruptcies in England and Wales average about 120 weekly.

OVER eight hundred British criminals have been executed since the accession of Queen Victoria.

ACCORDING to statistics, we Britons travel more by rail in our own country than any other European people.

FOR every hundred inhabitants of this country there are one thousand nine hundred railway journeys made per year, which means that, on the average, every person makes nineteen journeys. The average Belgian comes next with eleven journeys, the German and the Frenchman average five journeys each, and the Italian shows his contentment with little locomotion by restricting himself to one railway journey per annum.

GEMS.

IGNORANCE is always trying to tell more than it knows.

HE who knows right principles is not equal to him who loves them.

NOBLE desires, unless filled up with action, are but a shell of gold hollow within.

THE courage and heroism which accept the burdens of life and follow the call of duty, however footsore and weary, bring to the heart a peace and serenity which are not far from true happiness.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HAM TOAST.—Cut some thin slices from a stale loaf, toast them, and cut them into square pieces. Put the yolks and whites of two beaten eggs into a stew-pan with an ounce of butter. Stir them two minutes over the fire. Spread them over the toast, and lay over them a sufficient quantity of cold ham or tongue, grated or minced, to cover the eggs. Serve very hot.

WALNUT WAFERS.—One half-pound of brown sugar, one half-pound walnut meats slightly broken but not chopped, three even tablespoonfuls of flour and one-fourth teaspoonful of baking powder, one-third teaspoonful of salt, two eggs. Beat the eggs, and the sugar, salt, flour, and lastly meats. Drop small spoonfuls on buttered pans and bake until brown.

A DELICIOUS WAY OF COOKING VERMICELLI.—Put on one pint of milk with two ounces of desiccated cocoanut, and let it get quite hot, then add quarter pound of vermicelli; let this cook till tender. Now add two ounces of well-washed and picked sultanas, put the mixture into a glass dish, pour over it one cup of cream, and sprinkle the whole over with bleached and chopped pistachio nuts.

CHESTNUTS FOR DESSERT.—Peel some chestnuts, boil them so as to be able to skin them without spoiling them, and throw them into a basin containing tepid water slightly acidulated with lemon juice. Make a syrup with sugar, the weight of which must equal that of the chestnuts, and a stick of vanilla. When hot pour it over the chestnuts and let it stand over night. Next day drain off the liquor, put it over the fire, and when quite smooth put in the chestnuts and let them gently simmer. Again let them stand and repeat the operation—that is, put the syrup to simmer till it is ready to boil, then add the chestnuts and let them boil till they become transparent. They can then either be dried on wire frames and kept in tins, or be placed with their syrup in pots and preserved in that way. Either will do equally well for the purpose of dessert.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A WHALE can remain under water for an hour and a half.

ON the early railways a lighted candle at night in a station-house window meant "stop;" its absence was a signal to go on.

PERSIAN ladies, when at their meals, squat on the floor, and eat with their fingers. They never use a knife or fork.

THE smallest bird is an East Indian hummingbird, which is hardly larger than an ordinary horsefly.

THE Chinese have a god for every disease, even for childhood's afflictions like the mumps and measles.

THE art of ruby-making is now extensively practised. The gems thus produced are known to the trade as Geneva, and are largely used for jewellery watches.

IT is a fact, established upon the authority of travellers in different parts of the world, that stammering is almost unknown among savage tribes.

A RUSSIAN physician asserts that new bread is far more beneficial to the consumer than that which has been cut and exposed to the air, and has had time to gather the numerous germs which find in the material a nutrient medium.

DYES from autumn leaves might seem a natural and matter-of-course production, but until recently no such thing has been thought of. Some German chemists have, however, succeeded in extracting a substance from ripened vine-leaves that with appropriate mordants will colour beautiful shades of brown and yellow.

THERE is a tree in Western Australia called the jarrah tree, the wood of which is said to be almost everlasting. The natives make nearly everything of this timber—planes, work-boxes, wharves, buildings, and ships. It has never been known to decay, and is poisonous to all insects. It does not burn freely, but only chars, which makes it specially valuable for building purposes.

THE delightful labour of flower-farming is steadily on the increase among the people of the Scilly Isles, the astonishing quantity of forty tons of cut blossoms, chiefly narcissus, being sent over to England weekly during the winter season. The farms, which employ many hands and much capital, are excessively interesting, and the sight of them in February or March is worth even the risk of a rough voyage. Literally millions of white and yellow blooms, richly fragrant, nestle between tall hedges of euonymus and veronicas, and form a fragrant picture—as exquisite as it is unique.

EVER since aluminium became low enough in price to make its use for ordinary articles possible, horsemen have hoped to utilize it for horseshoes. Many experiments have been tried, but with indifferent success, until very highly tempered steel in small particles was incorporated in the softer metal. This furnished wearing points and increased its durability wonderfully. In cavalry service over an exceedingly rough and trying road horses travelled for twenty-eight days, covering a distance of three hundred and sixty miles. This test was most thorough, and proves that steel-armoured shoes are suited to all the needs of the cavalry service.

FOR many years flooring and ceiling lumber has been made with the same tongue-and-groove matching edges. There are some rather serious objections to this, as the edge of the groove splits off and the tongue is quite likely to do likewise. But, although there is a new patent out for this purpose, it does not seem to be as practical as the old method. In the first place, it is important that lumber be so fitted that it can go together either side up. By the new plan it cannot do this, which is in itself against the invention. A joint with a more shallow groove and less prominent tongue would answer the purpose quite as well, would be far more durable, and would certainly cause less waste—a point which the consumers of lumber will at no very distant day be forced to consider.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. C.—You must be more explicit.
 VIOLANTE.—It is as neat as it is legible.
 B. L.—We have no recipes for shaving pastes.
 TROUBLE.—There is really no unfailing cure.
 DON.—Roderick Dhu is a fictitious personage.
 J. H.—Far too intricate to be dealt with here.
 DOUBTFUL.—We never recommend investments.
 JON.—Apply to the officer who pays your pension.
 IVAN.—It depends entirely on the rules of the club.
 STEW.—Steaming a stale loaf of bread will freshen it.
 R. T.—We think the phrase is not correctly rendered.
 J. G.—Sunflower stalks are now converted into paper.
 HENRY.—The Heights of Alma were stormed by infantry.

VERY ANXIOUS.—We cannot undertake to say how the case would go.

APPREHENSION.—It is purely a question between you and your employers.

WHAFTFUL.—We cannot understand the case. Please be more explicit.

RUPEK.—Excessive smoking unquestionably tends to weaken the eyesight.

M. R.—Horse Guards, blue; Life Guards, red; white plumes.

ALACK.—It is purely a matter for the exercise of your own judgment.

OLD READER.—We do not feel qualified to offer the advice desired; we have no experience.

H. J.—At the present time a half ounce letter can be sent to Australia for twopenno halfpenny.

RODIE.—There is certainly nothing better than shaving for promoting the growth of the hair.

P. C.—It is derived from the imaginary name formerly inserted in forms of soldiers' accounts.

IN DISTRESS.—Well-burned toast eaten cold and dry will assist in preventing flatulence.

PORELEN.—Sevres-ware, pronounced as-vr-ware is a very fine porcelain, manufactured at Sevres, France.

TEAL.—Feed him on soaked maize, hemp, canary seed, and millet, also fruit and dry blonits, no sweetmeats.

W. T.—A little lemon juice added to the water in which which rice is boiled will keep the grains separate.

BART.—Offer yourself to a recruiting sergeant; he may know a regiment with vacancies at present for ladies.

B. R.—Cut out the suckers from the centre of the nut bushes and thin out elsewhere to let in the light and air.

ROTHA.—Let him go his way, and in time some other admirer will appear to take the place of the one complained of.

IGNORANT.—The apostrophe after the word marks what is called the plural possessive—that is where more than one person is meant.

UNSUCCESSFUL.—Probably you did not boil it long enough. Try again; it is not always easy to succeed on a first attempt.

B. M. D.—In confinement the bright colour of the head invariably fades; there is no particular food to prevent this.

CONSTANT READER.—A publican is just like any other tradesman, baker, butcher, grocer, or draper, at liberty to sell or refuse to sell as he thinks fit.

EVA.—Glycerine is not good for the hair. Rub vaseline into the roots, then rub with an old linen towel and brush until clean.

V. H.—We advise you to remain where you are until you have something more than promises to rely upon. Never give up a certainty for an uncertainty.

E. K.—Take of muric acid ammonia half a dram; lavender-water two drams; distilled water half a pint. Apply with a sponge two or three times a day.

GOD.—Newspapers are no more answerable for advertisements which appear in their columns than bill-posters are for the placards they put up.

REGULAR READER.—Probably it is greasy and would, therefore, require to be sponged first with diluted benzine, and after with plain water.

SHIM.—The Koran is the most recent of the world's Bibles, dating from about the seventh century after Christ.

M. Y.—No demand anywhere in the States; the wages run from one-fifth to one third higher than here, but then the cost of living is higher too, and cost of passage is additional.

VINGENT.—The word compass comes from the Latin word for circle, and the compass is so called because its card on it has all the points round the circle of the horizon.

BERNARD.—The origin of the adage, "Whom the gods love die young," is ascribed to the Greeks. Horatius and Menander each make allusion to the sentiment—so do many of the Roman classics.

GRANTISS.—Has tallness been common in the family? If so your height is not unusual, and you may put other two or three inches to it within the next three years.

DAWNIE'S LOVE.—A necktie case, handkerchief case, book or some bit of metal or china for a smoking set would be a suitable present for a gentleman.

DISCONTENTED.—We would not advise you to attempt to change immediately, but to scan the "wants" in the daily Press, with the hope of improving your position.

POLLY.—A skewer is always better than a fork for testing vegetables while cooking, as it does not break them up so much.

J. G. S.—Many springs are intermittent, probably because the channels leading from the reservoirs to the surface are crooked, and constitute natural siphons.

MAINE.—Put gloves on hands and wash them in spirits of turpentine (two pennyworth from chemist) until they are quite clean, then hang them in air to dry.

KENNETH.—If a lady with whom you are walking returns the salutation of a person who is a stranger to you, you should also return it, not for yourself, but for her.

D. O.—Coal has been wrought in Germany for a longer time than in this country; we cannot give precise date, but this will show you that there is nothing in the supposition in your mind.

JANEY.—Mushrooms, when once cooked, should never be rewarmed to serve a second time at the table. After becoming cold they are apt to develop injurious properties.

CHERATED.—You must first discover who has taken the coat, and then you can have them punished for the theft. But until you can prove either of them guilty you have no remedy.

IT MATTERS NOT.

The snow-flakes fall without a sound
 Unnumbered to the cold, grey ground,
 Where my poor darling peaceful lies,
 Unminded of the loveliest kisses.

Ah, well! It matters not to me
 What season of the year it be,
 If roses rare or violets sweet
 Bloom in the sunshine at my feet,
 Or if the autumn lingers long,
 With the faint odours of the wood,
 Sweating across the hazy morn,
 Soft morns in which to dream and brood;
 Or if the spring-time comes apace,
 With kisses for the earth's wan face—
 Kisses that make her pulses glow
 With youth and strength and beauty's glow—
 It matters not, if she must keep,
 Untouched by all, her dreamless sleep!

Where is she? She whose tender eyes
 Looked into mine with glad surprise!
 Whose voice so soft, so sweet, so clear,
 Made glad my heart when she was near.
 Where is she? Is she anywhere?
 This is the burden of my prayer:
 To know beyond a doubt or fear
 That somewhere she keeps faith for me;
 That death is but another name
 For God and Immortality.

K. S. M.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Anything can be done nowadays with the human eye; but where there is any disease the defect will not be treated gratuitously at any institution; you would have to pay a good sum to be operated on.

E. T.—El Islam has the largest cathedral in the world—St. Sofia's at Constantinople. Next to this ranks St. Peter's at Rome; thirdly, the Jumma Masjid, or cathedral of the old Moslem city, Bijapoor, in India; the fourth is St. Paul's, London.

LORD RONALD.—The children of the Sovereign become of age at eighteen. The reason of this is to obviate the inconveniences of a long regency, when the prerogative of the Crown being divided between several persons the government is generally inefficiently carried on.

CARRIE.—If the skin is naturally coarse nothing can change it entirely. The use of glycerine and rose-water and the most scrupulous cleanliness will improve it. Wash thoroughly, then rub in the glycerine and rose-water while the skin is still damp.

FARRANT.—There are dealers in all of the large cities who handle stamps, but they will not give values without seeing the stamps. One must pay very well if he wants to buy, but when it comes to selling, there seem to be no offers for most sorts of stamps.

MARCUS.—The rules generally settle the mode in which disputes with the management of the society are to be decided, and if the society is a mere trade union the courts of law will not interfere; if it is registered as a friendly society you will have redress as provided by the rules.

Q. U.—To endeavour to make their listeners believe that they are proficient in certain arts and sciences, when they have only a superficial knowledge of them is to indulge in deception unworthy of any self-respecting member of good society. There is no sense in pretending to know more than we really do.

KERIAN.—Steel knives or other articles which have become rusty should be rubbed with a little sweet oil, then left for a day or two in a dry place, and then rubbed with finely-powdered, unslaked lime until every vestige of the rust has disappeared, and kept in a dry place wrapped up in a bit of bannel.

FLORISS.—Put the bulbs in glasses or earth, and set them in a dark corner to sprout. If in glasses, the water should not be higher than one inch below the bulb, until the roots have reached the water, when the glasses may be filled up, a piece of charcol placed in the water, and the plants set in the sun to grow.

BROWN BEAUTY.—Cut the slices lengthwise and rather thick. Lay them on a gridiron over a rather slow fire. Spread some melted butter over the slices with a brush. As soon as the under side is broiled, turn each slice over and spread with butter. When done, dish, salt and serve hot. A little butter may be added when dished, according to taste.

UNHAPPY NORA.—You must have treated your admirer very harshly to elicit from him so indignant a letter. You should have had more regard for his feelings, knowing his sensitive nature, hasty temper, and proneness to jealousy. Still we do not think he will remain irreconcilable, especially if you write to him the right kind of letter.

INQUIRER.—The finest earthenware is often painted and finely decorated. Such earthenware is generally called faience or majolica. The first name is taken from Faenza, a city in Italy, where a great deal of decorated earthenware was once made. Majolica is supposed to come from Majorca, an island in the Mediterranean, where the Arabs formerly made much fine pottery.

HOUSEKEEPER.—The plan is to clean down to the glass, then put bits of glass on edge round the place so as to form a box, pour on quicksilver until there is a deposit of about an eighth of an inch, then lay the mirror back down on that, pressing it firmly, when surplus silver will flow over and can be caught; the mirror may be lifted next day, but takes weeks to dry; it is cheaper to give the job to a glazier.

TOMMY.—The national colours of Great Britain are red and blue; of the United States, stars on the blue with white and red stripes. The Austrian colours are red, white, and blue; the Bavarian, red; those of Denmark, red with a white cross; those of France, blue, white, and red; of the Netherlands, red, white, and blue; of Portugal, blue and white; of Prussia, white; of Russia, white with a blue cross; of Spain, black, yellow, and red; of Switzerland, red with a white cross; of China, yellow; and of Mexico, green, white and red.

MADEIRA.—The assurance that some admirers possess not infrequently gets the better of their judgment, and while they may not always mean to transgress the rules of propriety, it is apt to lead them into a line of conduct not sanctioned in good society. If all young girls would consult their self-respect more than they do when occasions arise to manifest it, it would be better for themselves, and would teach a much-needed lesson to those of the other sex who take advantage of circumstances to go beyond the limits of decorum.

DANNY.—Boil water in a tea-kettle, keeping the supply of water below where the spout enters the body of the kettle. When the water boils this will give off a good flow of steam through the spout. Hold, strained out so as to give full effect, the marked or fastened portion of the velvet. The steam will cause the pile to rise; it may need a little soft brushing, but that you must judge yourself. Allow the stained portion, when raised, to remain well expanded till it has quite dried. If black, a light sponging with either a weak solution of borax or benzine. The latter, which is most effective, will require the garment to be hung in a current of air for some hours to get rid of smell.

AMBITIOUS ADA.—No one in this country of wonderful possibilities should despair of bettering his or her social condition and taking rank mentally with the most favoured. If the acquisition of accomplishments be necessary to one's elevation in the world, musical instruction is not beyond the attainment of a large number of young women who are self-supporting. The study of modern languages is also within the reach of even those of small incomes, and many a young woman has become a fair linguist by continued application. We do not know what facilities you have for self-education, but we make these remarks with the view of stimulating your ambition to gain the ends desired.

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ALL LETTERS to be addressed to the Editor of THE LONDON READER, 54, Strand, W.C.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 54, Strand, by G. F. CORRY, and printed by WOODHALL and KIDDER, 70 to 75, Long Acre, W.C.